Augsburg College Library
3 0510 00659 0279

Floyd Dell

D38F
XMo

Class
Book

WITHDRAWN

WITHDRAWN

MOON-CALF

A Novel

81
D38F
XMo

by

Floyd Dell

New York
Alfred · A · Knopf
1920

174414

COPYRIGHT, 1920, BY
ALFRED A. KNOPF, INC.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

81
D38F
XMo

TO

B. MARIE GAGE,

DAUGHTER OF THE MIDDLE WEST,
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
THIS TALE OF THAT STRANGE REGION—
THIS RECORD OF ITS GRIM YET GENEROUS
HOSPITALITY TO THE FANTASTIC BEAUTY
OF YOUNG AMERICAN LIFE

174HH

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2021 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/mooncalf0000unse_p2m5

CONTENTS

BOOK ONE

MAPLE

I The Fays 3
II Ellen Dreams 11
III Shadow-Shapes 22
IV First Flights 36
V "What Is Known as Egotism" 49
VI The Stranger Sex 62
VII The Hand of Reality 77
VIII The End of Maple 89

BOOK TWO

VICKLEY

IX A Family 95
X Felix: Dictator 102
XI A Critique of Pure Reason 107
XII Two Against the World 113
XIII The Not Impossible She 123
XIV The Break-Up 132

BOOK THREE

PORT ROYAL

XV Loneliness 145
XVI Rhythms 155
XVII To Nowhere and Back 163
XVIII Helen Raymond 172
XIX Initiation 178
XX The Art of Writing 184
XXI Work 191

Contents

XXII The Factory World 196
XXIII Adventure 200
XXIV Utopia 206
XXV Central Branch 212
XXVI Revelation 217
XXVII Adopted 220
XXVIII Discoveries 227
XXIX The Transvaluation of Values 235
XXX Vistas 244
XXXI People 253
XXXII Advice 260
XXXIII Accident 268

BOOK FOUR

THE CABIN

XXXIV Education 277
XXXV Reversion to Type 283
XXXVI Statistics 291
XXXVII The Quest 297
XXXVIII The Girl 302
XXXIX Explanations 306
XL Reactions 316
XLI Argument 323
XLII "If Young Hearts were not so Clever" 332
XLIII Ethics 337
XLIV Truce 347
XLV Opportunities 352
XLVI Economics 358
XLVII Escape 363
XLVIII Quarrels 368
XLIX Interim 374
L "And Still a Garden by the Water Blows" 380
LI Past and Present 385
LII Ending 393

Book One

Maple

I The Fays

I

WHEN James Fay died, he had held the office of county treasurer, and the respect of all his fellow citizens, for so long that it seemed as if it had been always so. He was Sawter County's grand old man.

It is many years now since his death, and he is still remembered in Sawter County. But the story which keeps his memory alive goes back to an earlier time, when he was not respected by his fellow citizens — to the time when he was old Jimmy Fay the crank. Old Jimmy had not changed; it was not in his nature to change. It was the whole United States, and Sawter County along with it, that had changed. It had taken a civil war to make old Jimmy Fay popular among his neighbours.

Old Jimmy was an Abolitionist — at that date perhaps the only one in southwestern Illinois. He hated slavery — profoundly and passionately. He had always hated it; and he was to live to see his neighbours go to war against it, and come home honouring him for having been the first among them to denounce it. But slavery was not an issue in Sawter County — yet. The free soil of Sawter County was washed by the Mississippi, and the sympathies of its citizens caressed by the slow pressure of a southward-moving current of interest. Speakers at the grand political meetings, knowing this to be in the zone of doubtful sympathies, avoided the subject. Politics meant little to Sawter County, anyway — less than might have been supposed from the attendance at the meetings and barbecues. The taste of fresh roast pig, after long months of salt pork, was the real attraction — not the speeches.

Sawter County was still indifferent to the Slavery Question when news came of the Dred Scott decision. The Supreme Court had ruled that a slave could not gain his freedom by escaping to free territory — he was property north as well as south. Only one person in Sawter County was particularly interested in that news. To old Jimmy Fay it was a day of tragedy. And to mark his sense of it, he declared a fast for himself and his family.

This was the story by which old Jimmy Fay was destined to be remembered. Sawter County regarded it as a choice example of his quaint cussedness. Gathered around grocery store stoves, at supper tables, at fences by the roadside, the whole county laughed.

As the report travelled it was elaborated upon. It was said that not only had old Jimmy made his whole family go without food that day, but his horses and cows and pigs as well. As Tom Jenkins, the Maple barber, told the story, old Jimmy Fay had gone the rounds of the stalls and pigpens, and said, looking down at the famished and wondering animals, "Mourn, ye brutes! for Justice is perished from the land!"

Old Jimmy was not loved in Sawter County. He never would have anything to do with his neighbours, even in the pioneer days of communal barn-raisings and corn-shuckings. He never lent a horse or a tool; and he never needed to borrow. He was a long, lean and habitually silent New Englander of Scotch-Irish stock. He had come there in the early days with his little Pennsylvania-Dutch wife, and raised a family of six sons, with whose help he had conquered one acre after another until he had the largest farm in the county. He drove to Harden with wheat and corn and potatoes as the market for these grew up; once a year he went to the notary public, and added to the Fay farm a contiguous patch belonging to some unthrifty neighbour; after the formation of the Republican party he came in to attend its caucuses, and to vote; but except on such occasions he was never seen in public. The Fay farm was like a

citadel, or a nation within a nation — inhabited by the half-mythical figure of Jimmy, and his submissive wife and obedient sons. They were not allowed to attend any of the local festivities, nor pay attentions to the neighbouring girls. It used to be jocosely said in Sawter County that "old Jimmy's saving his boys for nigger wives — our girls ain't good enough for 'em." Only the youngest of the sons ever broke through this iron tyranny.

The youngest was Adam. He was unlike his brothers, who had their father's length and silentness. Adam was short in stature; and he alone inherited from his Dutch mother the softer contours which half concealed his sturdiness. Strangest of all in a Fay, he was a talker, fond of a joke, good-natured and sociable. His tendencies toward frivolity were sternly discouraged; but he evaded his father's prohibition and went to a barn-raising when he was fifteen, and learned to dance. Old Jimmy was said to have beaten him with the stick which always stood in the corner for purposes of education; and young Adam was said to have broken the stick afterward and thrown it out of the window, saying, "That's the last time *that* will happen." He continued to go to the dances.

When he was sixteen years old, Adam quarrelled with old Jimmy over the ploughing of a potato patch. "North and south I said it should be ploughed," declared old Jimmy, "and north and south it shall be ploughed," So Adam went to the barn and saddled his favourite colt, and rode away from the farm, to Maple, a dozen miles away. He never saw his father again until after the war.

2

Adam went to Maple because his father traded at Harden, in the other direction. Maple was a church, a saloon, a blacksmith shop and a few stores ranged on the four sides of a square. In front of his butcher shop, that noon, stood Bill Hollander. Bill was enormously fat and enormously good natured. He nodded to Adam.

Adam dismounted, tied the colt to the hitching post, and told Mr. Hollander that he wanted to learn the butcher trade.

Bill stared. "Whose boy are you?" he asked.

"I'm James Fay's boy, out Harden way."

"Old Jimmy Fay, eh?" Bill smiled.

Adam had fought it out more than once when people said "Old Jimmy Fay" and smiled in that fashion; but this time he only flushed and was silent.

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"Any muscle in those arms?"

"Try me and see!"

"All right. Hit me — here." Bill patted his great stomach.

"Hit you?"

"Go ahead!"

Adam hit as hard as he could. Bill Hollander's abdomen was like rock.

"Not so bad for a youngster.— And now I'll hit you." He rolled his sleeves an inch higher.

"All right!" said Adam.

Bill struck, and Adam picked himself up from the wooden sidewalk.

"Not so bad for a fat man," he managed to say breathlessly.

"You want to work for me?"

"Yes."

"Well, damn if I don't make a butcher out of you. What are you standing around here for? Take that colt back to the barn and give him a feed, and then get in the shop and get to work!"

In this simple fashion Adam Fay began adult life.

3

Two years later a recruiting station was opened in Maple, and a cavalry officer with fierce moustaches and a new uni-

form stalked the streets. Fort Sumter had been fired on, and it looked as if there really would be a war. Patriotic speeches were made in the square. Dick Hadley, the horse-breaker, was getting up a cavalry company. One conversation with him electrified Adam Fay. He enlisted.

" Boys will be boys," said Bill Hollander.

In the month at the training camp, private Fay of Company B, Third Illinois Cavalry, fought eighteen fist-fights, made many friends, learned to chew tobacco, and acquired the nickname " Banty." Also, the colonel of the regiment saw him galloping break-neck across the field, and picked him for his orderly.

It was much later, after an extended acquaintance with the character of this young orderly, that Colonel Clodd said to him: " Banty, you'll either be shot for general insubordination, or promoted for extraordinary and useless daring — and *I* don't care which!"

Strange things occur in the army of a democracy. Banty Fay had been assigned to hospital duty, which meant that he carried the mail to the corps hospital twice a day. This was easy work, and Banty was happy until one day he learned that his company was leaving for the front — without him. If Banty had been somebody else he would have realized that he, being attached to the colonel's staff, would go next day on the boat with the colonel. But all he could see was the tragic fact that Company B was going to the front, and that he was being left behind. He appealed to Captain Hardy, who said it was none of his affair. He appealed to Colonel Clodd, who enjoyed his orderly's discomfiture, and gravely advised him to see General J. about it — otherwise, added the colonel solemnly, he might have to stay here as long as the hospital did. Banty thanked him and went to the staff headquarters.

He found General J. ensconced behind a mahogany desk in a neatly-appointed office. He stated his case. The astonished general told him briefly to obey orders, and turned back to his papers.

Banty spat tobacco juice reflectively on the General's rug, and turned sadly to go.

The General, who was noted for his neatness, rose and denounced the outrage in the language of the major prophets. He ended by saying, "You are fined a month's pay."

"You might as well fine me a million dollars, General," said Private Fay. "I'll never pay it." So saying, he went out. And then an idea occurred to him. He hurried to the hospital, saddled his horse, galloped to the dock, and rode on to the gang-plank just as it started to lift. Company B cheered.

His insubordination was forgotten in the fighting that followed, so far as Colonel Clodd was concerned; but when the pay-roll came around, the fine was recorded against his name. He refused to sign the pay-roll. "You can't get your pay next month, if you don't," said the paymaster. "All right," said Banty. Next month found him still obdurate. He would not sign. The paymaster reported to Colonel Clodd the strange case of a soldier who refused to take his pay. The Colonel expostulated patiently with his orderly.

"I'll never sign it so long as that fine's on there," said Banty.

"Do you think you can hold out longer than the government can?"

"Yes, by God!" said Private Fay.

"You're a fool," said the Colonel. "But if you must be a fool, let me lend you some money."

4

In the operations around Vicksburg, the Colonel said to him: "How would you like a captain's commission? I can get you one if you want to work for it. There are all sorts of niggers around here that ought to be fighting for their country. You round up a company of them, and I'll attend to the commission."

"Thank you, Colonel," said Banty — and went to work.

He knew that if the rebels caught him enlisting negroes they would string him up to the first tree. So he worked quickly.

He found his negro, pointed a carbine at him, and asked whether he would rather die now or join the army. He brought in a batch of recruits every evening.

"Good!" said the Colonel. "And now while you are waiting for that commission to arrive, you can take charge of your niggers and put them to work building a road along the river for the artillery."

It was marshy ground, thick set with reeds and willows. The negroes, stripped to the waist, toiled in the blazing sunlight, cutting down underbrush and driving pilings, under the fierce eye of Banty Fay. The rebels sent an inquisitive cannon-ball or two their way, and the negroes dropped their tools; but they picked them up again. They were more afraid of the little man with the big moustaches than of any other form of death.

But as the sun rose higher and the wind changed, the odour of their terrified sweat came heavily to Banty Fay's nostrils. He was annoyed. Was this, he asked himself, what he had enlisted for? That night he went to the Colonel.

"Well, what is it now?" asked that patient officer.

"Colonel — I said I'd like a commission, but I didn't say I'd like to be a nigger overseer, and damned if I will!"

"Oh, go back to your company if you like," said the Colonel wearily.

Banty saluted. "Thank you, Colonel." He turned to go.

"By the way, have you signed the pay-roll yet?"

"No."

"How are you fixed?"

"I can hold out a while longer, Colonel."

"They'll never take off that fine!"

"I'll never pay it!"

"Well — good luck."

"Thank you, Colonel."

Nevertheless when Private Fay was knocked senseless by a spent ball, and left for dead on the field a few months later in Texas, the fine *was* crossed from the rolls. And when, at the close of the war, Adam Fay was released from a rebel prison — where he had made eleven daring and impossible attempts to escape — he collected the whole amount of his back pay. Otherwise, he said, he would have sued the government.

Pale but bearded, he lounged about the sunny streets of New Orleans for a month, and then felt sufficiently recovered to swim across the Mississippi river on a bet, defying the alligators.

Then, after a visit to his father's farm, he came back to Maple, where he won the pretty girl school teacher in a whirlwind courtship, set up a butcher-shop and a family, attended Grand Army reunions, voted the Republican ticket, quarrelled with his customers over politics, and failed in business.

II Ellen Dreams

I

THE name of the pretty school-teacher was Ellen Conway. She was one of three sisters who lived on a farm near Maple. Their father, a restless and luckless Irishman, had left the farm several times to the mercies of a hired man while he went off on some adventure meant to improve his fortunes. The first time he had gone back to Connecticut to look after a business which he had deserted, but which seemed to have revived under the care of his partner. Six months later, however, he was back on the farm. Twice he had gone westward in search of some Eldorado — the second time in the gold rush of '49. After that his wife heard from him at intervals for two or three years, but he never returned. Two separate reports of his death reached the family afterward — one report being that he had been shot in a California gambling resort, the other that he had been drowned somewhere in the South Seas.

The two elder daughters, Jane and Susan, regarded their father's memory with some bitterness. After his last leave-taking they had had to dismiss the hired man and work the little farm themselves. Their mother had died, and they had grown hard and grim in the struggle. They might have married, but they refused their opportunities scornfully.

Ellen had been little more than a baby when her father went away in '49, but she remembered him vividly. Her earliest memory was of being sung to sleep by her father to a quaint and rollicking tune which still lingered faintly

in her memory along with the romantic odour of his kiss — an odour which undoubtedly was a mixture of tobacco and whisky. The song which she remembered as a lullaby was also undoubtedly an improper one, judged by the fragment which remained in Ellen's mind, but which as she grew up she thought had somehow got into her childish memory by mistake — a tag of chorus consisting of the words: *"Damn! damn! damn!"* Ellen thought of her father often, wondered if he were perhaps still alive. He was to her a romantic and wonderful person.

Ellen did not like her chores on the farm. She preferred to go to school. She liked best of all to read and dream. She dreamed often of going away from the farm. Sometimes, in her fantasy, her father returned and took her away in a carriage. Her sisters would often come upon her when she was standing absorbed in a fascinating day-dream, while she was supposed to be washing dishes or feeding the pigs.

"Don't stand there with your mouth open," Susan would say severely.

"It's those books she reads," Jane would say.

When Ellen was sixteen years old she thought of a way to get free from the farm. She would go to Maple to teach school.

"Humph!" said Jane. "Do you think work some place else is any different from work here?"

"I hadn't thought about that at all," confessed Ellen.

"Let her go," said Susan. "She'll find out."

The day she left home, the sky was a bright fathomless blue.

Ellen stood on the doorstep, between the two boxes of moss-roses that were her sisters' one feminine weakness, waiting for Jane to drive the buggy around from the barn. Susan was saying something to her from indoors, something about her woollen underclothes, but Ellen wasn't listening. She was looking into the blue above the horizon with a gaze of shy, eager, miraculous trust.

2

At Maple, Ellen boarded at the home of Bill Hollander — who, besides being the town butcher, was a school director. Mr. Hollander amused himself by a kind of jocose cross-examination, conducted at the supper-table, in regard to the new teacher's qualifications for the task of educating the young people of Maple. At first Ellen was rather alarmed, thinking that he might be intending to use his influence to have her dismissed. But Mrs. Hollander reassured her. "Don't you pay any attention to him," she said. "It's just his way of talking." After that Ellen always caught the twinkle in his eye, and though she did not see anything humorous in his questions, she smiled and refused to be disconcerted.

"Every boy in the United States has a chance to be president — ain't that so, Miss Conway?" he would begin gently and persuasively.

"Yes," Ellen would say — suspiciously.

"Yes, siree!" and Bill would become eloquent. "Every boy in the whole U. S. A.! And that means a lot of competition when you come to think about it. The boys of Sawter County have got a lot to buck up against. But never mind — we're going to see that they get the right start. That's why we've got Miss Ellen Conway to teach 'em. No, I'm not making fun of you. Don't you see, if they wanted *me* to teach school, all I could teach would be the butcher trade? And if they went to Tom Jenkins, all he could teach would be how to trim whiskers. Most of us only know one solitary thing — if we know that much — so we're no good for teachers. We want somebody to teach the boys everything. So we got *you* to do it. And if one of 'em ain't president, it won't be our fault — now, will it?"

Ellen could never quite accustom herself to this kind of badinage. But she tried to attune her attitude, when under fire, to the serene indifference of Mrs. Hollander upon similar occasions. Mr. Hollander would come home quiver-

ing with excitement and say: "Ned Watson got a letter from his boy today." Ned's boy was at the front, in the same company with Adam Fay. Bill wanted her to ask what Ned Watson's boy had to say. But instead she would remark: "So Ned was in the shop today." Bill would turn, stare at her in feigned amazement and admiration, and say: "Well, what do you think of that! Guessed right the first time! I tell you what, few women would be able to make a dee-duction right off-hand, slam bang, and correct to the ounce. I've got a smart woman for a wife, I have!" — He would pause for breath.

"So Ned *was* in to the shop?" she would ask calmly.

"There's no use trying to fool *you,* Sally. I'll own right up. He *was.*"

"Did he bring the letter with him?"

"Yes."

"He'd just been to the postoffice?"

"I wondered if you'd guess that!"

"Had he?" she would persist.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Did he read you the letter?"

"Right again!"

"What did it say? Anything about Adam?"

And Bill would tell the news he had been wanting to tell all along.

Ellen learned a great deal about Adam Fay — some of it invented by Bill Hollander in the exuberance of his supper-table fancy. Mrs. Hollander aways rebuked him, saying calmly, "You know that ain't true, Bill." He would turn his head on one side and say, "Well, no, in a way it ain't, I grant you that — but it illustrates my point." In spite of these corrections, Ellen accepted a good deal of fable along with the truth, and it was in a kind of romantic flutter that she allowed herself to be persuaded to send Adam a message and a little present in one of their letters. She was advised by Mrs. Hollander to send him a little book of threaded needles, of large size as befitting clumsy, masculine fingers.

This seemed to Ellen an inappropriate gift to a soldier, but Mrs. Hollander reminded her that soldiers also have to patch their clothes. So Ellen made up for its prosaic quality by enclosing a " verse " written by herself :

"'Mid war's alarms do not forget
The ones who wait for thy return;
They know that Duty calls thee — yet
Their anxious hearts still fondly burn."

After it was despatched, she began to count the days before there could be a reply. But before the time was up, there came the news that Adam Fay had been killed in battle.

Ellen turned back to her teaching, and tried to make it occupy all her mind. It had long since ceased to be interesting, but she had been able to perform her duties patiently enough just as she had done on the farm, so long as there was a chance to day-dream at whiles. She had been weaving her make-believe so long, now, about Adam, that she could not stop. She could not believe he was dead. He was somehow alive. He would return.

A year passed. She was receiving the attentions of old Simpson, the postmaster and twice a widower. She was allowing him to court her because she didn't know how to get rid of him. She only awoke to the reality that confronted her when Mrs. Hollander took her aside for a serious talk about her future, a talk in which it was assumed that Ellen was going to marry old Mr. Simpson. Ellen was frightened for a moment. Was this what life held in store for her? She remembered what her sisters had said. Then she shook her head, and turned again trustfully to the solace of her prophetic dreams.

Then the war ended, and Adam Fay came back to Maple, and swaggered into the Hollander home. He was different from her dream. But his gaiety and his daring were there, frightening and alluring her in reality as in the dream. And because she was his most impressionable audience, he found

her charming. As for old Simpson, Adam took him outside the third time he found him at the Hollander home, and told him that if he ever saw him around the place again, he'd knock that new set of false teeth clear down his throat.

Thenceforth it was understood that Ellen was Adam Fay's girl.

And one night, driving home from a barn dance in the moonlight he kissed her. The next day, Susan, who had come to town to buy some new harness, saw her. "You needn't tell me," said Susan sharply. "I can tell it from your eyes. You're going to cook and wash and scrub and sew and have a houseful of babies for some man."

They were married in the little frame church facing the square. Standing up beside Adam, in a white dress with graceful billowing outlines over the slender wires, Ellen looked into his eyes with a gaze of eager, unreasoning, unreasonable belief.

3

Bill Hollander offered to take Adam in as a partner. "Your experience in the war ought to be worth a lot in this trade," he remarked genially. Adam did not like the pleasantry, but he accepted the offer. He and Ellen lived for a few months with the Hollanders, and then moved to a little place of their own on the edge of the town. Ellen was expecting a baby and was not quite equal to the housework, so they had a hired girl. Ellen would sit on the porch or wander in the woods back of the house all day. When Adam came home for his meals she would talk to him about the things she had been thinking of. Sometimes they were fancies which made Adam rather uncomfortable, he did not quite know why — foolish little notions about what the flowers said to one another. He supposed it was because of her condition; but he did not like it.

In the evening they would go driving — they had bought a gentle old mare, and Bill had given them one of his buggies. Ellen was vastly interested in the colours of the leaves

and the sky, and was always pointing out things for him to look at — at which he dutifully looked, though he could not see anything very interesting about them.

He had exhausted his stock of war-time stories of the more heroic kind, and had got down to a substratum of tales which she did not like to hear. She spoke of a piano; it would be nice if they could have one — nice for the children; it was true that she could play only a few tunes that she had learned by ear at the Hollanders. This reminded Adam of a story. "There was a fellow in our company," he said, "a fellow named Parks, Ned Parks. Came from Springfield. He's dead now — killed near Vicksburg. *He* was a man to play the piano! Never heard anything like it. One day when we were in Kentucky, him and me sneaked out of camp by a road we happened to know wasn't guarded, and went to a farm-house and bought a chicken dinner. There was a piano in the house, and he played it. And, by God, he could play! Another time, at another place in Kentucky, some ladies invited some of us to their house, and gave us sandwiches; he played for them then. But the time I remember best was in Louisiana. We'd just come into a town as the enemy left, and we followed them out — chased 'em till dark. Then we stopped, at a big plantation, and some of us went in to look for grub. The rebels who lived there had all gone — they hadn't expected us, for everything was just as they dropped it — there was a supper in the oven they hadn't stopped to eat. Well, after we e't, we went into the big front room, and there was a piano. Ned played for an hour, I guess, and we all sat absolutely quiet listening to him, and some of the boys was crying.

And then when he finished he got up and swung the piano stool over his head and smashed that piano to smithereens!"

"Oh! don't!" Ellen cried out, horrified.

"Well," said Adam, "it wasn't me did it — and anyway, why should we leave it for those rebels? There wasn't

much left of the whole place when we got through with it."

"But why the piano?"

As a matter of fact, Adam had been shocked by the destruction of the piano, at such a moment at least. But he felt obliged to take a strong masculine attitude on the subject.

"A piano's no different from anything else," he said.

"*You* wouldn't do such a thing," she flashed.

He laughed. "Oh, I don't know about that."

"You wouldn't," she reasserted, but she was silent all the way home. She returned several times to the subject on succeeding days, until he declared that he was sick of hearing about that Gol-darn' rebel piano.

Bill Hollander had come from St. Louis years ago; and now he was minded to go back there and spend the rest of his life among city comforts. He offered to sell out to Adam on terms so easy that Adam was able to meet them. But after Bill had moved, and the butcher shop was in his hands, he found that its upkeep was a severe strain on his resources. He borrowed some money, and they agreed that they could do without the hired girl for a while.

Adam was beginning to hanker for more of the society of his own sex. After a hard day's work, he liked to talk with the other boys — "veterans" as they were beginning to call themselves — down at the grocery store or the saloon. But he restricted his indulgence in these pleasures to Saturday nights and occasional holidays. One of these holidays presented itself on election-day — a time when it seemed more than ordinarily legitimate to foregather with his cronies. He told Ellen the night before that he would leave the house early the next morning and might be gone all day.

Adam was only one of many young "veterans" who had begun to find the feminine society of their wives a little tame. There was a flavour of old-time adventure in their own companionship, spiced as it was with selected reminiscence. They looked back to those old times as the best part of their

lives; and they felt in each other's society a free and easy sympathy and understanding that they missed at home. Election day — a man's day, with no women around to mar its felicity — was going to be a real holiday.

"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! Polls are now open!" cried Tom Jenkins, the clerk of elections, standing on the steps of his barber-shop, today a polling place.

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes! Oh, yes! Saloons are now closed!" cried Mike O'Leary from the steps of the saloon on the corner, ushering out a flock of citizens who had risen early to perform the duties of the day. Adam Fay was one of them. Wiping his moustache, he marched over into the barber-shop, to be the first to cast his vote. Then he and his fellow-patriots adjourned to the back of Henderson's grocery store, to denounce the "traitors" and predict a glorious victory for the Republican party. The meeting lasted all day.

At six o'clock Tom Jenkins stood again upon the steps of the barber-shop. "Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!" he cried. "Polls are now closed!"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes! Oh, yes!" answered Mike O'Leary from the corner. "Saloons are now open!"

The patriots filed in. Shortly after midnight, Adam, with a consciousness of a great duty thoroughly performed, returned home, to find Ellen prematurely in labour with her first child. She had been alone in the house all day. The baby died a few hours after it was born.

4

But, as the years passed, new lives came, upon which to set her dreams. Eddie, the oldest, was a maker of much-admired pictures in coloured chalks; he was going to be an artist when he grew up. Jimmy, a year younger, was already a little gentleman — so neat with his clothes, distressed at a spot on their starched immaculateness. Ann, the baby, had an odd, whimsical beauty. Wonderful children they were, full of shining promise.

As she dreamed upon the happy lives that were to be theirs, she served them in brave, pitiful, sordid ways. They had moved into a large house in the middle of town, and they had a hard-fisted hired girl to help with the work, but there was more to be done than two women could do. And the children, who had at first shared with her their griefs and hopes and tasks, began to grow up, out of her confidence, out of her life. They let her cook and wash and mend for them, but they kept their secrets to themselves. They were no longer, in the way they had been, hers. Sometimes, when the reality of their natures broke in rudely through her idealizations, she would declare that they didn't act like her children at all. They had been such lovely children, and now —

The older they grew, the less like her children they became. Little Ann was a tomboy, and no one ever had any peace of mind, for wondering what she might be up to next. Being a tomboy sounded very well in stories, but in reality it was different. And her language — you would never imagine that a child's lips could utter such words! It was a wonder where she picked them up. But you couldn't keep her at home. And her temper! Well, it seemed as if she must have been changed in the cradle by gipsies!

As for the boys, they were strange, stand-offish creatures who were engaged in pretending to be men. They even hated to be asked where they were going in the evening.

Jane, visiting her sister, noted her obscure grief. "Ellen," she said, "you can't expect babies to stay babies for ever. Eddie is fifteen years old, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Ellen, "But I wish —"

"I know you'd like to keep them babies, but you can't."

"I wish —" said Ellen.

"What?"

"I don't exactly know."

Perhaps it was in answer to her wish that another baby was born, the next year — a frail boy with the bluest of eyes.

5

"I'm going to name this baby myself," declared Ellen. The other children had been named by her husband — prosaically, she thought.

"All right. Name him Percy if you want to," said Adam. For some reason the idea of naming a boy Percy was considered, in southwestern Illinois, humorous. The remark meant that Adam had other things to think about, and could not turn from considering them even to avert such a comic tragedy as naming his son Percy.

Adam was thinking about his butcher shop. It was on the point of failure. He had in the exuberance of party loyalty told several good customers, who happened to be Democrats, that they were traitors and ought by rights to be strung up to the nearest lamp-post; and they had taken their trade to the other shop, and failed to settle their outstanding accounts with Adam.

Ellen, dreaming over her blue-eyed boy, decided at last on a fitting name. It came to her like a flash of happy augury:— Felix. Felix for happiness.

That night the child had the croup, and for three years was almost continuously ill.

III Shadow-Shapes

I

SCARLET fever. . . . Measles. . . . Whooping-cough. . . . Stomach-troubles. . . . Ear-ache. . . . Colds. . . . Medicine. Bitter and sticky stuff. "Put out your tongue."

A bedquilt world, with the vast squares of the quilted coverlet stretching endlessly before him. Shapes of people going tiptoe, to and fro, in the yellow lamplight. Whispers. Medicine bottles, tall and short, red and black and brown, on a chair at the head of the bed. Flowers on the wall-paper. Cracks in the ceiling. Pain and sleep. Dreams. . . .

From this background Felix emerged at times to play quietly about the house, sitting preferably in a corner with his toys and picture-books. More rarely, he went out into the yard to play, staying near the kitchen-door, where his mother could see him and not be worried. Outside of the house he seldom ventured.

In the house lived Mamma. She carried him to bed, and would say "poetry-pieces" to him before he went to sleep if he asked her, and she gave him bread-'n'-butter-'n'-sugar between meals. She was beautiful and kind, and never cross with him. Sometimes she would play with him. Then she was the nicest person in the world, and his very own Mamma. But at other times, when he came eagerly to her with his picture-book or his toys, she would say, "Run along, darling, I'm talking to Papa." She was a different person then, not his own at all, but a stranger; and he would go away, grieving and hurt.

Papa was in the house only at night and on Sundays. He worked in the woollen-mills. Sometimes when he came

home at night, after Felix had rushed eagerly to pull off his big felt boots, he would take Felix on his knee while Mamma was getting supper ready, and tell him stories about the war. Almost always he was nice and kind and funny; but sometimes he was fierce and terrible. He whipped Ann sometimes — but that was because she had been a bad girl. He never whipped Felix. Felix was a good little boy. His mother always said so.

Ann was his sister. She went to school, and when she came home in the afternoon she would dash in, throw down her school-books, and dash out again to play. She was always late to supper, and Papa would say, "Where's that girl of yours? She ought to be helping you with the housework. Off gadding again, I suppose. Why do you let her run wild like that?" And Mamma would say, "I can't do a thing with her any more. I can't imagine what's come over her, she used to be such a nice child, with such pretty manners. Now she doesn't mind a thing I tell her." Felix shared this grown-up disapproval of Ann. She was always teasing him and making him cry, and then calling him a cry-baby.

Jim was one of his big brothers. He went to school, like Ann, but he was very different, and much more grown-up. He was quiet and dignified. Felix admired him. He was always reproving Felix for spilling things on his clothes, and Felix despaired of ever being like him.

Ed was his oldest brother. He was a man like Papa, and worked in the woollen-mills. He was very nice to Felix. He would bring home little bits of coloured wool, red and yellow and blue, and give them to Felix to play with. He would draw pictures for Felix, and sometimes he gave him pennies.

Sack Sheets was the hired girl. Her real name was Sarah, but everybody called her Sack. She scrubbed Felix's ears until he cried, and never would let him come to the table without washing his hands. She told him queer things, which he did not quite believe, because when he asked Papa

or Mamma about them they laughed at him. He had once tried to find out for himself, when she told him you could catch birds by putting salt on their tails, but he had not been able to get close enough to a bird with his handful of salt to find out. When he asked Papa if it were really true, and confessed that he had tried it, Papa laughed at him so loudly that he sullenly resolved never to make himself ridiculous by asking questions again. After that he just thought about things by himself.

The pigeons and the cow Felix never really got acquainted with; they were sold when he was very young — just before the family moved, to another house that was not so big as the one they had been living in. But always there was the cat — an old grey cat named Corbett, after the "champion" that Ed and Jim were always talking about. Corbett was Felix's playmate: Felix talked to him freely and confidentially, and wept into his fur when he had been scolded.

All of these beings, except Corbett the cat, were somewhat strange to Felix. They were part of a world which he did not understand and in which he was never quite at ease. In that world Felix moved clumsily — mistaking what he had been told to do, dropping and breaking things he was asked to carry, being blamed and laughed at. Even his mother seemed at times to belong to that outside world, and he had a queer resentment against her, which died down and was forgotten and then flickered up again, because of her desertion of him at such times. It was not enough that she continued to serve and love him — Felix felt that she ought to belong to him wholly and live with him in his world.

2

Felix's world was a world of dreams. He had gone to sleep looking at the discoloured cracks in the ceiling and the flowers in the wall-paper, and had seen them move and change fantastically, and merge into the shapes of sleep. He had sat on the floor gazing into the coals of the open

fireplace until those radiant doors of fire had opened and let him into a grotto of fantasy, and the glowing transformations of the dying embers became the changing landscapes of a place that never was. Moving tree-tops and clouds had taken him away to that land, and the little rivulet of water that flowed down the street past the house after a rain could carry him there. It was a land of shapes which changed and lived more vividly than anything in the real world, and among which he was mysteriously happy.

Very slowly pictures in books began to mean something to him. His mother had shown him the pictures of the Three Bears in his fairy-book many times, and told him that this was the Great Big Bear, and this Goldilocks, before he could understand what she meant. Ed's pictures were different, for he drew Corbett the cat, and Papa coming home in the snow with his big boots on, and birds sitting on a fence. Felix had seen these things and he could understand them. He thought Ed a wonderful person for being able to draw them, and was always asking for a new picture of Corbett the cat. But he did not feel the real magic of pictures until one day in an illustrated paper he found a drawing of a ship with its sails full of wind, splashing the water about its bow. He was thrilled, for this picture *moved*. It was like the clouds and the tree-tops and the changing shapes in the coals. It moved, and carried him away with it, out of this world, into his own. He took the pictured ship to bed with him, and carried it to the table, and refused to give it up even for a moment. Sack Sheets, the hired girl, complained that she had to wash one of his hands while he held that picture in the other. It became grimy and tattered; but it remained the most wonderful thing in his life, and he refused to be comforted when, having forgotten it somewhere one day, he could not find it again. He cried himself to sleep every night for a week after that, and was only half consoled when Ed bought him a big book full of coloured pictures of the American Navy. These battleships were not that dream-ship of his.

But they weaned him from his grief. He made a fleet of them and manœuvred them about the kitchen floor, becoming very angry with his mother if she stepped on one of them. Then suddenly the ships lost their interest for him; he had found something else.

It was a picture of a man standing up and waving a sword. It fascinated Felix just as the picture of the ship had done. But when it inevitably was lost, he did not mourn it. He found himself a wooden stick which he waved above his head, strutting about the kitchen and shouting "Hi!" and "Now then!" His father took an interest in this game, and undertook to teach him how the sabre was used in the Third Illinois Cavalry during the war. Felix, flattered by these attentions, allowed himself to be taught. "High cut for cavalry — charge!" "Low cut for infantry — charge!" and Felix galloped about the kitchen on a broomstick, waving his wooden sabre in more or less the correct military fashion. But something of the glamour was gone from these supervised and realistic proceedings. And then Felix fell sick with one of his periodical ailments, and when he recovered was less boisterous. Perhaps it was partly due to an incident that occurred on his first day outdoors, when, after giving the command to himself in a loud voice, he charged the asparagus bushes — only to trip on his broomstick and fall painfully on his nose; and then heard the jeering laughter of a group of little boys just outside the fence who had been watching his military game unseen. "High cut for calv'ry! High cut for calv'ry!" they called after him as he went crying back into the house.

He had always liked to have his mother tell him stories, even though the stories she told did not, as narratives, capture his attention. Her repertoire was limited to half-a-dozen nursery fables, such as Jack the Giant Killer and Little Red Riding Hood, together with a few reminiscences of her own childhood. She was not a good story-teller, and Felix did not pay to her stories the strict attention he paid to his father's tales of the Civil War, and of humorous

happenings in the mills and in the town. These he understood more fully than his mother's fairy-tales, to which he listened with a wandering and half-dreaming mind. But in the fairy-tales nevertheless there were passages that fascinated him — scattered among incomprehensible and dull untruths. Felix did not believe in Giants, nor in animals that talked. These seemed to him akin to the story of catching birds by putting salt on their tails, and Santa Claus coming down the chimney on Christmas Eve — they were things which people pretended to believe but knew all the time were not really true. But in those same stories were true things, too — things about caves and jewels, and palaces under the sea, and princes with magic swords. Out of these glimmering hints Felix wove, as he listened, his own stories, clothing the nakedness of who knows what infantile and primitive notions in the shining fabrics of romantic fantasy. . . . Sometimes, as he dreamed to himself in a corner after one of his mother's stories, he saw a cave, full of shining jewels and heaps of gold, and a throne in the centre, upon which sat a beautiful young queen, with a kind face like his mother's. Fierce bearded men with swords stood about her. And Felix himself, bound hand and foot, lay on the floor at her feet. These men were going to torture him; though perhaps the dreadful instruments with which they crowded around him were no more than fantastic dream-versions of the instruments which doctors had thrust into his mouth and nose and ears. . . . And he had to endure these torments heroically for her sake, for the sake of the beautiful queen who sat upon the throne and smiled down at him. . . . Such strange fancies as these he would dwell upon fascinatedly for hours, and return to day after day, expanding the incident with variations and elaborations into an epic cycle, until the flavour of it was no longer so intoxicatingly sweet in his mind. And all the while he would sing to himself as the recurring chorus of these adventures some quaint, senseless perversion of the "poetry-pieces" which his mother said to him at bed-time:

"Little Boy Blue,
He put on his shoe,
He put on his shoe,
He put on his shoe."

One day they moved to another house, and rummaging in the garret he found, among some dusty school-books, a tattered copy of the Arabian Nights. There were pictures in it that he liked, and he asked his mother to tell him what the book said about them. She read him the story of Sindbad the Sailor, and the story of the Caliph Haroun al Raschid and the Three Ladies of Bagdad. His imagination leaped to the height of this new conception of adventure, and henceforth his favourite rôles in his own play-stories were those of the disguised Caliph and the luckless sailor of Persian romance. His mother had never been able to make head or tail of the stories which he had sometimes breathlessly shared with her, so mixed up were they of all the stories she had ever told him and of sheer foolish nonsense. But these new Arabian adventures of his she could understand and enjoy taking part in, and his happiest moments were those in which she played for him, on the floor of the kitchen in some interval of cooking and baking and washing dishes, the parts of the Three Ladies of Bagdad, or a Princess captured by a Genie and carried away to an Island upon which Sindbad the Sailor had just been wrecked.

Felix grew accustomed to dramatize his play, and made more and more demands upon his mother as a playmate. But then Sack Sheets went away, and his mother had to do all the housework and did not have time to play with Felix. He was incredulous of her excuses, and hurt at the hurried and impatient way in which she sometimes refused his eager demands. He grew estranged from her, and would not even ask her to read stories to him any more, preferring to find his own themes for make-believe. He still cut out paper-dolls, as his mother called them, from the illustrated papers. The pictures in the Arabian Nights had led him, in selecting these figures, to incline toward pictures of ladies

in a more or less undressed state; and when one day she looked over the collection in his cigar-box and burned up in the kitchen stove half a dozen of his choicest princesses, and would not tell him why, he felt her to be a hostile stranger. So when he found a beautiful princess in a pocket of one of Jim's old coats — in reality it was the picture of a burlesque actress, in tights, from a packet of cigarettes — he hid it away where his mother could never find it, and the consciousness of this secret deepened his alienation from her.

One day his sister Ann brought into the house a copy of a lurid "family story paper." On the front page was a picture representing a tall moustached man advancing threateningly upon a lovely lady, who stood defying him with outstretched arm. Felix looked at the picture for a long time, finding the elements of one of his queer stories in it. He began to enact the scene, taking by turns the part of the fierce man with clenched teeth and clawing fingers, and the proud and scornful lady. But he felt the need of words to accompany the game, and so he asked his sister what it said under the picture. "Get thee behind me, Satan, said Ethel," she read to him. The words satisfied Felix, and he went off repeating them in a dramatic tone — misremembering and mispronouncing the name Satan as though it were spelled "satin." That night before supper, unconscious of the presence of the family, he was at his play, when his mother asked suddenly, "What are you saying, Felix?"— and he realized that he was being an object of amusement to them all. He shamefacedly repeated his verbal formula, "Get thee behind me, Sattin," and when they asked where he had got it, he defiantly brought them the paper. Ann giggled and explained. The paper was passed from hand to hand, and everybody laughed loudly. His mother told him, in a kindly enough way, how the name Satan was pronounced, and who Satan was. But Felix, who was struggling to keep back the tears of humiliation, felt only that he had made a fool of himself again. Thereafter he

was careful not to act out his play aloud or in his own person. He went back to his old habit of dreaming quietly in a corner.

He would find some picture that interested him, in an old magazine or newspaper, and cut it carefully out with his mother's scissors. Then he would put this new picture with his collection of old ones, treasured in his cigar-box, and slowly sort them over, putting them together in groups of twos and threes. All at once some happy juxtaposition of pictures would strike his fancy, and sitting there before a few paper figments — representing, it might be, a fashionable lady advertising the latest shawl, and a man demonstrating the accuracy of a certain kind of rifle — he would forget the world and lose himself in some dream in which he accompanied these magic figures. As he looked at them, they began to move, they grew larger, they created about them a world of their own, they spoke, saying things which had meaning only in their world. Felix listened, entranced. With moving but silent lips, and eyes focused on scenes not present in reality, he lived with them their vivid and beautiful life.

3

Most alien of all to Felix was the world of outdoors, where boys played games he did not know how to play, and mocked at him and hurt him. He made explorations only a few times into that outdoor world, and was glad to come back to the house and play with his paper-dolls. He was happiest when he was let alone; then, making up stories and living in them, he lost the sense of helplessness and bewilderment that made him so miserable outside. If they would only let him alone!

But he was always being dragged out of his corner. One Sunday afternoon, when he was four-and-a-half years old, his sister, aged twelve, took him out for a walk, in spite of his protests. "A little outdoors won't hurt you," she said. But he felt miserably sure that he was going to be got into trouble. And sure enough, Ann met some of "her

crowd," who told Ann to come along — one of the boys had climbed in the back window of the "opera house" and unlocked the door, and they would all sneak in and play.

"What'll I do with this?" she asked — meaning Felix, as he realized with helpless humiliation.

"Oh, bring it along!" they said.

The "opera house," a small wooden theatre and gymnasium, stood in the midst of a large open space. Casually, as if merely "cutting across the lot," the adventurers walked past the back door, glanced about, and slipped quickly inside.

Felix was led by the hand into a darkened space in which the shouts and laughter of boys and girls echoed terrifyingly. When his eyes had adjusted themselves to the twilight, he was startled to find himself apparently on the brink of a vast gulf. His sister had led him out to the edge of the stage and was calling down to somebody in the auditorium. Felix shrank back. Just then, out in the half-darkness, he saw somebody high in the air, swinging toward him and then away from him.

"Come here, I can't hear you!" called Ann. And, as if the flying figure had made a leap through the air, it swept closer to them, past them, caught at something in the air above their heads, turned upside down, hung for a moment by its toes, whirled upright again, and dropped lightly to the floor beside them. It was one of the boys, who had been practising on one of the "flying rings" which extended the length of the building, and who had finished with a demonstration of his skill on the trapeze. Felix felt dizzy.

"Pretty good," said Ann carelessly.

"Well now," said the boy, "we've all been hearing about the girl-circus you and Nellie and Rose have been having in the Caldwell barn, and how good you are on the trapeze. And we'd like to see. Here's your chance!"

Another boy came up. "Come on now, Ann, let's see you perform. I dare you!"

The other boys and girls took up the cry—"Dare you! Dare you!"

Ann, her hands on her hips, looked at them scornfully. "You think I don't dare! I'd show you, if it wasn't for these clothes!"

"You can wear mine," the boy said.

There were shouts and laughter, "Dare you!"

"All right!" said Ann. "Hand 'em over!"

There was more laughter, and Ann disappeared at the back of the stage, and presently emerged wearing knee-pants. Cries of applause greeted her.

"What'll *I* do?" complained a boy's voice from the back.

"Wear mine!" said Ann. "You're welcome to 'em."

He came out grotesquely, wearing Ann's petticoat. Meanwhile Ann had climbed into the trapeze, and presently she was swinging back and forth over their heads, hanging by her knees. This did not surprise Felix. He was past being surprised now. This was all part of that strange outer world which he did not like. He wanted to be back home.

Ann had just transferred herself from the trapeze to one of the flying rings when some one came running in with an alarm. "Quick, everybody—get out! Pete the watchman's coming!"

There was a rush for the back door. Only Felix, and the boy with Ann's petticoat on, stayed, while Ann, caught midflight on the flying ring, swung to the limit of its oscillation and then back again. She made a flying leap to the trapeze, dropped beside Felix and the boy, and said, "There's no time to change back now, Dick! We'll skin over to Tom's woodshed—no one'll see us," and she fled with him to the door, calling back to Felix, "Hurry, hurry!"

Felix plunged into the darkness after them. He mistook his way, and started to push himself between two back-drops against the wall. He stumbled through the narrow chasm, pushing at the canvas walls on each side of him. At the

AUGSBURG COLLEGE & SEMI
George Sverdrup Library
MINNEAPOLIS MINNES

end was a wall hung with ropes. Felix groped his way around the edge of the canvas and started back between two more pieces of scenery. The place was very still now, and Felix knew that he was alone and lost. He went on, stumbling and frightened. The passage seemed endless. He stopped. He had known something terrible would happen to him if he left the yard. He sat down and cried.

His sister, coming back, found him there a minute later. And because of that lost minute, Pete the watchman found her there, too — in boy's clothes.

He was scandalized, and declared he was going straight to her father and tell him about her.

"Damn!" she said. "Come on, you little fool. Damn! Damn!"

"And I'll tell him that too," said Pete.

On the way home, she shook Felix savagely. But she did not skin over into Tom's woodshed. Instead, she walked defiantly down the main street of the town, with Felix bawling loudly at her side. She stalked into her home.

"I've only one thing to say," she declared to her distressed mother. "If Pa beats me, I'll run away."

4

Her father did beat her. Felix was taken into the parlour, and held tight in his weeping mother's arms while it was being done.

Ann was a husky little girl, and her father was tired after his long day's work in the woollen-mills, and the beating was hardly a disciplinary success. Finally, because she kicked and bit and scratched, she was taken upstairs and shut in the garret. Then, red and angry and stern-looking, Felix's father came into the parlour. "Is supper ready?" he asked.

Felix could not eat. As soon as possible he slipped away and went unobserved up the stairs to the garret-door. He could hear Ann crying inside. The garret, where the walnuts came from, had always seemed to him a mysterious and delightful place. But now, filled with the sound of weeping,

17444

it became dreadful. Felix sat down on the top step and cried too, helplessly and silently. He did not want his sister to know he was there, because he thought she would blame everything on him.

Suddenly he remembered a story his mother had read to him, the story of the cruel Bishop Hatto shut up in his Tower and eaten alive by rats. He wondered if there were any rats in the garret. Probably there were. He had often hated his sister, and wished that some dreadful fate would befall her, but now in the presence of what would have seemed this afternoon a just punishment for her wickedness, he felt sick with horror. . . . The sound of weeping inside grew louder, became hysterical, and died away in broken sobs. Then it rose again, the crying of a frightened child, a sick screaming of despair. And to Felix his sister was no longer at this moment a part of the grown-up world, to be hated or feared, but some one like himself. She beat on the door with her fists and gasped: "Let me out! let me out!"

Felix looked at the door. It was not locked, but held shut by a board braced between it and the wall of the garret-landing opposite. As Felix looked at the board, a great and terrible idea occurred to him: to knock down the board and let her out. Impulsively he struck at it with both his fists. It slipped, fell, and caught again on the lower panel of the door. Another blow would clear it away. But suddenly Felix grew afraid, and hurried down the stairs.

He paused at the bottom and looked back. He had defied the mysterious and terrible order of his universe. To have hit that board was an act of rebellion against the law, cruel but righteous, which ruled his little world. He was trembling. He felt as one feels who has committed crime, treason and sacrilege.

The sobbing grew fainter. Then there was silence. "Maybe she is dead," he thought. He wanted to run away. But instead, he sat down on the bottom step. And into his mind there came a picture, as vivid as the pictures of his

play-dreams, in which he saw a vast darkened space, and across that, swinging lightly and airily on a thread of silver wire, a shape that was like that of the Youngest Princess in his picture-doll collection. As she swung nearer he could see that she was hanging by one bent knee, and her arms were outspread. Below her was darkness and space, and Felix felt her danger, but only as a strange and beautiful pang, a cool shiver of delight. She swung toward him, and then away, with a smile. And in that smile there was something new. Felix had known only his mother's smile, fond and tender and warm, making him all hers. There was something in the smile of this girl in his dream that was cool and far-off, like the shine of the stars. She was not thinking of Felix, she did not belong to him. It was a smile which said, "Look at me! See what I am doing! Look! Look!" And suddenly the picture changed, and it was Felix himself who was flying aloft through the air, and gazing down at multitudes, and crying, "Look at me! Look at me!"

The dream faded, and then, without understanding why, Felix ascended the stairs and pulled away the board.

"Who's there?" whispered Ann.

The door was pushed open, she looked out. "Oh, it's you!" she said in surprise.

She had recovered herself. Her childishness was gone. She was again a part of the strange grown-up world that Felix feared. He drew away from her as she put out her hand: he was afraid she was going to shake him again. But she put her arms around him and kissed him. "You're a nice little tyke," she said.

"Are you — are you going to run away?" he asked timidly.

She laughed. "I guess I won't — this time," she said.

IV First Flights

I

FELIX discovered, one morning when he was not yet five years old, that he could read. He had been looking at his favourite picture in the Yellow Fairy Book. He had said to his mother so often, "Mamma, read me that part," that he knew the passage beside it almost by heart. He put his finger on the printed words, one after another, and spoke them aloud: "The — Prince — took — her — hand —" He stopped, with the realization that he had been reading. It was so wonderful that the thought of it made him feel faint. He went back and traversed the words again with his finger, saying them hesitatingly. With a kind of fearful awe he proceeded down the page.

Yes, it was true — he could read! And suddenly he began to cry out in piercing tones, "Mamma! Mamma!"

She came running, her arms white with flour from bread-making.

"I can read! I can read!" he cried.

Hardly less excited than Felix, she sat down with him, and he demonstrated the use of his new magic power before her eyes.

"You shall go to school this fall," she said, and kissed him fondly.

When his father came home, the demonstration was repeated for his benefit. "You will be going to school before we know it," said his father, patting Felix's head.

Jim said he was a little scholar, and that he would have to learn to keep his face clean when he went to school.

Ed gave him five pennies.

Only Ann refused to be an audience to his accomplishment.

"Don't you want to hear me read?" he asked, taking up the book.

"Not on your life!" she replied.

His mother diplomatically emphasized the importance of the occasion, but she refused to be impressed. "He can read. Well, what of it?" she demanded scornfully, and dashed out of the house to meet the girl who was waiting for her at the gate.

Felix was grieved. "Never mind," said his mother. "When you go to school you can read to everybody!"

So Felix came to look forward to school as a place made especially for him — a place where he would be admired for his talents. His first thought had been, when he had proved to his mother that this open sesame was really his, that he would use it to read *everything* — all the stories that no one had read to him, the story-papers that Ann sometimes brought home, the old books in the trunk in the attic, Papa's newspaper — they must all be very interesting and wonderful. But now that his attention had been turned toward school, he took up instead the old discarded "readers" that his sister and brothers had used.

Their contents were not — as he found when he had further mastered the art of reading — very interesting; but he had a sense of virtue in "studying" them. He knew that his family approved of his doing so, and they were always willing to stop whatever they were doing and tell him what some new word was, if it was in a school-book. If it was his book of fairy-tales that he brought up to them, they were less patient. And once his mother took away from him one of the books he had found in the trunk in the attic, one with coloured pictures that showed what your insides looked like. Felix saw that other books were not regarded with the same approval as were school-books; so he applied himself diligently throughout the summer to these, in the expectation of reward at school next fall.

2

The first day of school came. That morning Felix was dressed carefully in the whitest of starched kilts. His mother curled his yellow locks round her fingers, and stiffened them with the white of an egg. He marched off proudly at Ann's side.

The happy journey was marred by one unfortunate encounter. Two ladies stopped to look at Felix, and one of them said to Ann, "What beautiful curls your little brother has! Does his hair curl that way naturally?"

"Yes ma'am," said Ann, loyally and dutifully.

"Yes'm," corroborated Felix, emboldened to speak for himself. "And mother fixes it with white-of-egg!"

Then Felix knew from their smiles, and from his sister's scornful jerk at his arm, that he had done something foolish. . . . He was overcome with confusion and shame. He did not know what it was, except that the thing which was always happening to him had happened again. He felt like crying — until he thought of school. That would be different. He lifted his head.

They reached at last the great red brick building, at the top of the hill, and Felix took his seat confidently where he was told. He sat awaiting his opportunity to show everybody how well he could read.

It disconcerted him that the room was full of other children, among whom he almost felt lost. Many of them seemed to know each other. Signals and whispers began to flash back and forth all about him. He tried hard not to feel strange and lonely there.

By way of beginning, they were told to shut their eyes, and the teacher, a plump, kindly-faced woman, passed up and down the aisle, putting a toy animal on each desk. Then they opened their eyes, and each child was called on in turn to tell the name of the animal he had. Felix's animal did not interest him. It was a pig. He was fascinated by the one on the desk just ahead of him, a striped

zebra. Felix wished he had that one. When the teacher called on him he became confused, and answered "Zebra!" A shout of ridicule arose about him, and cries of "Pig! Pig!"

Felix was angry. Of course he knew it was a pig. But he could not explain. The questioning had passed on, and Felix and his mistake were forgotten. But Felix sat there, still blushing with shame and anger. . . . He had a momentary flash of sick resentment against his mother, who had dressed him up that morning and sent him off so unsuspectingly to this hateful place. . . .

Then they all did some exercises, in which they pretended to aim and fire a gun. The teacher would say, "Ready — Aim — Shoot!" Felix knew better than that, because his father had taught him the manual of arms. He was troubled about the teacher's ignorance of this important matter, and finally spoke up boldly and told her that the command was "Fire" instead of "Shoot." She rebuked him for his impudence.

He disconsolately occupied himself with making moustaches on his face with his lead-pencil. He was surprised and delighted at the attention it attracted, but very much ashamed when the teacher told him to go and wash his face. There was a washbasin in the window which he had to take down to the pump in the yard. But the basin had some water in it, and when he took it between his hands and started across the room, it tipped and spilled its contents on the floor.

"Go to the janitor and get a mop," said the teacher.

Felix went out obediently. But he did not know exactly what a janitor was, or where it might be, and he dared not go back and ask, revealing his ignorance, so he wandered helplessly and shyly all over the building. At last he ventured to ask a boy whom he found out in the yard. "He is in the furnace-room, I suppose," said the boy. "Where is the furnace-room?" asked Felix. The boy told him scornfully.

Felix found the furnace-room at last, but the janitor was not there. So Felix began to hunt him desperately all over the building. He could not return to the room without the mop. After half an hour he found the janitor out on the front steps, and came back with the mop.

The water had long ago been wiped up, and the incident forgotten. At Felix's entrance into the busy room, mop over shoulder, everybody burst out laughing. Felix stared foolishly at the floor, and grew very red and hot.

"You have caused us a great deal of trouble, Felix," said the teacher gravely. Felix had all he could do to keep from bursting into tears.

And in the afternoon, at recess, a big boy of eight, named Hubert, took Felix's cap and ran down the hill with it, and would not give it back. Felix followed him about, begging for it, trying to catch him when he ran, and vainly endeavouring to snatch it when it was held teasingly over his head just out of reach. Felix at last turned away, resolved to humiliate himself no longer. "Oh, here's your old cap," the boy said scornfully, holding it out; "come and get it."

Felix came — and the sport began anew. Angry and crying, Felix started home.

His sister saw him trudging out to the sidewalk, and ran to find what was the matter.

"Hubert, was it? — the big coward!" she cried. "I'll fix him!"

She returned with the cap — after boxing Hubert's ears for him — and flung it scornfully to Felix, saying, "Why don't you fight?"

"Cry-baby!" called the boys. "His sister has to fight for him!"

When Felix came home that night he avoided his mother and sought the company of Corbett the cat in a dark corner of the woodshed, and cried bitterly into its comforting fur. School was not what he had expected it to be. It was just like all the rest of the outside world — only more strange,

more cruel, more bewildering. He resolved that he would never go there again.

3

Nevertheless he did go. There was no getting out of it. In the school-room it was not so bad after a while, for his ability to learn and remember his lessons did command the admiration of the teacher. But every day at recess, Hubert confiscated his cap.

Ann refused to help him. "You've got to learn to look out for yourself," she said.

The school-term passed somehow, and vacation came. It was a period of glorious freedom from the torments of Hubert. When it was over, Felix dreaded to return. But return he must.

The first morning of the new term, he came upon Hubert suddenly as he turned the corner of the school building, at recess. Felix, with a desperate memory of all his wrongs, and with a heart full of misery and fear and rage, sprang suddenly at his tormentor, striking wildly with both fists. One of his clumsy and unexpected blows knocked out a tooth, and Hubert backed away, spitting blood. Felix was frightened at what he had done, but still more afraid of Hubert's revenge; so with a scream he advanced anew upon his victim, raining blows upon him. Hubert turned and ran, with Felix after him, sobbing and waving his fists. A teacher came up, parting the quickly gathered crowd, and caught Felix by the shoulder.

"You naughty boy! Go and wash your face!" she commanded.

Felix, ashamed and alarmed, hurried off. He had, he supposed, done something dreadful. . . . He was greatly surprised when, at afternoon recess, he was treated by the other boys with marked deference, and invited to join a game of "dare-base."

He did not understand what had made the difference. But he began to like school a little.

He also began to look with curiosity, and not merely with timidity, at the town through which he passed on his way to school. There were places where he learned to loiter and look — in front of the stationery store window, with its display of Diamond Dick and Nick Carter "novels," on the covers of which every week some new and exciting episode was pictured (— it was wrong, Felix knew, to read these "novels," but no one had said it was wrong to look at them); in front of the hardware store, with its pocket-knives and other shining tools which Felix had no realistic desire to use, but loved for their brightness and sharpness; and at the door of the blacksmith shop, the most exciting place of all, with its sizzling of red-hot horseshoes dropped in water, its pungent smell of seared hoofs, its roaring bellows-blown fire, and the music of hammer on anvil. Then there was the "park," the square about which the stores were ranged. In the spring the boys played marbles and tops there, and at noon groups of idlers hung about talking and telling stories, with a fringe of boys for audience. There was a band-stand, where the band played on the Fourth of July. It had an upper story, open like the lower on all sides except for a little wall only a few feet high; no stair or ladder led up to it, and Felix wondered what it was for and if there was anything up there. His fancy supplied an answer. He used to pretend to himself that if he climbed up there he would find huge stacks of old "novels" like those that hung in the window of Spotwood's stationery store. (It was wrong to read them, but not wrong to *pretend* to read them.) He would climb up there some Saturday, he pretended to himself, and lie there unseen, luxuriating in this forbidden treasure-trove. . . .

It was in the summer after his second year of school that Felix discovered the public library. Across the street from the Fays lived a family whose eldest daughter had gone to "the city," that is, to Vickley, to work, and she was spending her vacation with her folks back in Maple. She was bored and hot, and she wanted a book to read, but she did not

want to dress up and go down to the public library. As she was lolling on the front porch with a copy of the Maple *Adage* for a fan, she saw Felix playing in his front yard, and called him across. "Do you want to run an errand for me?" she asked, and scratched off a note to the librarian asking for "some interesting book of fiction — not too heavy." Felix went where he was directed, to a place over the candy-store, and was given the book. He ventured to stay and look — rather timidly, for he did not know that this was not a store where things were sold — at the books and magazines lying on a large table at the side of the room. No one ordered him away, or humiliated him by asking if he wanted to buy something, so he determined secretly to come to this place again.

He did. It was some time before his nervousness and sense of trespass wore off, as he came to observe that others were doing the same thing as himself; to forget his embarrassment, he immersed himself as quickly as possible in the stories and pictures he found in the magazines and books on the table. . . . He experienced more than once, in those first few weeks, the imaginary joys of the treasure-trove he had pictured in the top of the band-stand, as he sprawled there at the table during the long afternoons, reading bound volumes of "St. Nicholas."

In a short time his face became familiar to the librarian, a strict but kindly old lady, and after a while she asked if he did not want to take some books home. "Can I?" he asked. She wanted to know his name, who his father was, and where he lived; then she gave him a blank to have his father and some neighbour sign. He took it home with diffidence, uncertain how his adventure would be received. But it was regarded with approval, and so he went back to the library, where he looked with new curiosity, and for the first time boldly, at the shelves of books behind the desk where the grey-haired lady sat.

"And now what do you want?" she asked, beaming upon him.

Felix did not know. What he really wanted was to wander among those shelves of books, and handle and look at them freely and find out for himself what he wanted. But he did not dare say that. No one, he knew, ever went behind that desk except the grey-haired lady herself, and sometimes a still more aged person, a man whom Felix recognized as the preacher who had once made a little speech at the school.

"Shall I pick out something for you?" asked the librarian.

"I don't care," said Felix shyly, meaning, "if you please, thank you!"

"Here," said the librarian triumphantly, and handed him a much-worn book, labelled on the cover "Elsie Dinsmore."

Felix took the book home and read it faithfully, but he was glad when he had finished it. However, when he came back the next week, he was given the next succeeding one of what appeared to be, as the weeks went by, an endless series of volumes which grew more and more difficult to read. . . . Presently the continuity of the series was broken, the volume which Felix was presumed to want being "out." So Felix was changed over to "Frank on a Gunboat," and then to the Oliver Optic series. . . . Felix read the books as they were given to him, except that he never returned to follow the fortunes of the admirable Elsie; but the early magic of the adventure of reading was gone.

Then one day he picked up on the counter a book whose pictures interested him; he clung to it, and was reluctant to take the Oliver Optic book which the librarian had ready for him. The librarian glanced at the book, smiled, and said, "You don't want that book — it's too old for you." A wicked idea came into Felix's head, and swallowing hard, he asked, "Could I take it for — for my mother?"

"Oh, certainly," said the librarian, and gave him both books. After that, Felix carried home two books each time, one of some standard series for children, and one wildly experimental choice. The strangest of these choices was a volume of Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy," and

the most fascinating of them "Les Miserables." He read the latter book with intense interest in spite of the fact that he could not understand very much of it; what he did understand was the sublime detective-story of Javert and Jean Valjean; but the parts which he did not understand nevertheless impressed him, and he felt in turning over its pages that he was in the presence of something strangely magnificent. . . . The memory of this book haunted him for a long time, and its name (pronounced according to a fashion of his own) stayed in his memory. He had heard of a man who read a book by Charles Dickens once a year; Felix had tried to read Dickens, but he had found its text as queerly silly as the drawings by Cruikshank which embellished it. He did not see how anybody could read such things once, let alone doing it over and over. But he remembered the idea; there was something fine and distinguished about it; and he said to himself, "*I* will read Less Miser'bles again every year!"

4

Across the street from Felix that summer lived five boys, who always played together. Sometimes Felix played with them. Back of the Burgess boys' place there was a gulley with a stream running through it, where they sailed boats and had sham battles with wooden fleets carved from cigar-box lids. They made bows and arrows, and shot at targets. They waded in the stream and caught crawfish. They lay in the sun and talked. Also there was a big woodshed on the Burgess place, where they had fixed up a trapeze. Felix entered into these sports with zest if not with skill; but it was not until Peter, the oldest Burgess boy, developed a fancy for reading, and would stay in the cool woodshed and pore over a book while the others went out to the gulley, that he began to find companionship. He would bring his book over to the woodshed and read, too, and discuss the merits of the various books they had both read. Their common interest in books was a bond between them which

gave Felix a warm glow whenever he was with his friend, and which made Peter more patient of Felix's clumsiness in outdoor play. Peter was a year older than Felix, and ordinarily the most active of all the boys. He carefully taught Felix how to perform the most difficult feats in leap-frog and mumblety-peg and even trapeze-acting, but he could not succeed in getting him not to be afraid of a ball when it was thrown at him. He discovered Felix's special ability in puzzles and guessing-contests, and encouraged him in everything with praise. At last he insisted on taking Felix to the swimming-hole, whither they were all forbidden by their mothers to go, but to which they sneaked away two or three times a week. Felix had never accompanied them, because his mother had said he must not. But Peter said he would teach Felix to swim, and Felix screwed up his courage to the point of assenting.

But before the time set, the family decided to move — to a smaller and cheaper house — and Felix never went. The new house was on the other side of town, and Felix, fearful of the dangers of disobedience, did not go back for his swimming-lesson. His half-formed friendship with Peter dropped, and when they saw each other again at school in the fall, it was as casual acquaintances. Peter had other chums, and Felix was immersed again in the day-dreams which books unfolded for him. He was rather contemptuous now of Peter's literary tastes, which had never risen higher than boy's adventure stories. Felix was reading the romances of Alexander Dumas.

Jim had not gone back to school that year. He was working in a store and getting enough money to dress decently on, and he preferred to keep on working. "I'd rather be ignorant," he declared passionately to his mother, "than always wear patched underclothes."—"Well," his father commented philosophically, "Jim always was a dude!" That fall Mr. Fay quarrelled with the foreman at the woollen-mills and lost his job there. He went to work hauling rock for the new road between Maple and Harden, but the wages

were not so good. Ann gladly took the fact that her wages were needed, as an excuse to quit school and go to work in Miss Tanner's millinery store. Even then she was bitterly discontented with life in Maple — "a one-horse town," she called it. Ed was working now as a house painter. He had hoped to become an artist, but the nearest thing to art in Maple was sign-painting, and there was not enough of that to make a living by.

Mr. Fay took these incidents lightly, on the theory that the family misfortunes were only temporary. Mrs. Fay grieved, and resolved fiercely to herself that Felix should finish his education — whatever happened.

Felix submitted to the routine of school, and got good "marks," but his real life was elsewhere. Every afternoon as school was let out, he would go to the public library. He would come home at dusk, his head with its cluster of yellow curls bent over a book which he read as he walked, another volume held tightly under his arm.

Of his odd appearance with his belated curls, Felix was utterly unconscious. He might have worn them for ever without protest. But his brothers criticized, his sister mocked, and at last when he was eight years old, and had been chosen to "speak a piece" at a school entertainment, his father said that the curls must go. The piece was "Sheridan's Ride," and his father said that it would look silly for a boy who looked more like a girl than a boy to speak it. His mother had carefully rehearsed Felix in the speaking of his piece, and she thought that the curls made the whole effect much nicer. She would *not* have his hair cut, she said.

But Mr. Fay defied his wife's injunction and took Felix over to Tom Jenkins' barber-shop. Old Tom Jenkins snipped off the curls, and Mr. Fay remarked that Felix looked something like a boy at last. But he put the severed curls carefully in his pocket.

When Felix came home and exhibited his shorn head, his mother cried. His father took the curls from his pocket and

gave them to her. She put them away in a little box with the baby-dresses of her dead child.

That night it seemed to him that his sister came and kissed him as he slept, and said good-bye to him. He did not know whether it was a dream or not. But the next day he remembered it when they told him that Ann had gone on a visit to some friends in Vickley. But his mother cried a good deal, and Felix knew that Ann had run away at last. She wrote a letter home a month later, saying that she had gone to Chicago, and had a job in an amusement park. Felix was glad she had gone, and he hoped she was happy. She was a wild thing, it seemed to him, who must fly away into strange places. His imagination followed her a little enviously at first. An "amusement-park"—what could that be like? But soon, among his books, he thought no more about her, except at Christmas time, when she sent him a pair of skates. He was much impressed, but he had a feeling that he would never use them. He wished it had been a book instead.

V "What is known as Egotism"

I

FELIX'S fondness for books was known all over town. And thereby occurred a strange experience. . . .

One summer afternoon, when Felix was ten years old, as he started from home to go to the library he turned back impatiently at the gate, thinking that he heard his mother calling to him from the house. He was mistaken, but as he looked back he noticed, above the low roof of the summer-kitchen that jutted out from the side of the house, a thin curl of smoke that seemed to be trickling between the shingles. The house must be on fire, he thought, and he ran back excitedly to give the alarm.

His father, who was not working that summer, came and saw the smoke, and together they ran and fetched a ladder from the barn. His mother brought a big pail, and Felix pumped it full of water at the cistern. His mother stood on the ladder and handed the water up to his father, who dashed it on the roof, while Felix refilled the pail at the cistern.

The neighbours across the street saw them, and ran over, and somebody went for the fire department. The Cederwall boys joined Mr. Fay on the roof, and some one took Mrs. Fay's place on the ladder. She went inside and directed the removal of the household goods from the lower rooms. All the upstairs was now full of smoke, and presently flames could be seen through the windows. Some one broke a window, and pail after pail of water was poured in. All this time Felix worked furiously at the cistern, filling one pail after another. Then there was a clanging of bells, and the whole Maple fire-brigade arrived. At that moment the metal pin which held the pump-handle in place

worked loose and came out, and the handle flew up, hitting Felix a dizzy blow in the nose. As there was no further need of his services now, he retired to a distance, and standing amidst the hastily removed tables and beds at the other end of the yard, watched the firemen put out the fire. All was over in half an hour.

The water-soaked house was uninhabitable, and the Fays were taken in by the Farrells, who lived across the street. Felix helped tell the story of the fire to all comers, and after supper went down town with the youngest Farrell boy to give a first-hand account to any new audiences that might demand it. But in the square they saw Tom Jenkins, the barber, the centre of an interested group, and they caught the phrase, "the fire," so they edged in to hear what he was saying. Yes, he was telling the story of the fire.

He had not been there, and perhaps for that reason was the better able to make a dramatic narrative out of the event. Felix listened in something between annoyance and admiration from the outskirts of the crowd, and was about to step up and correct the story-teller on one point — (the Fay furniture had *not* been "totally destroyed") — when he heard his own name spoken. He stopped where he was, abashed. He instantly thought that some tribute was going to be paid to his devoted services at the pump before the fire-department came. But that was not the story that Tom Jenkins had to tell.

"Felix, the boy's name is," he was saying. "You've all seen him going through the streets here with his nose in a book, not seeing a thing. You have to get out of his way to keep from running into him. If there was an earthquake, he'd never know it. The only thing he'd notice would be that the books at the library were kind of mixed up. If there was a flood, he'd probably get a-straddle of a hen-coop and paddle down to the library just the same. It's what I've told you many a time about the dom*inant* passion! Well, this little shaver was sitting out on the front steps finishing a book when the fire broke out. . . ."

("I was not!" thought Felix.)

". . . Did he notice it? Not him! His mother weeping and wringing her hands, his father up there on the roof swearing like a trooper and calling for more water, the flames roaring and the sparks falling all about him — and he sat there as quiet as a mouse, until he'd finished his book. Then he started to go into the house to get another one. Just like the way Tod Cheepy smokes cigarettes, lighting one from the butt of another, that's the way he reads books.

"As I say, he started into the house. One of the Cedarwall boys saw him, Pete Cedarwall it was. 'Hey you!' he says, 'you can't go in there. The house is on fire!'— 'Oh,' he says, surprised —'Is it? I didn't know.' And he hung around there, waiting for the fire to go out, you see, so he could go in and get that book. But the doggone fire wouldn't go out — looked as though it was going to burn the whole blame house right down to the ground. The kid must have figured that out, because pretty soon he wasn't there. Nobody'd noticed where he went, but pretty soon his mother came up calling out, 'Where's Felix? Where's my boy?' And nobody could tell her, and then she said, 'Oh my God! He's in the house!'— No, they said, he was here just a minute ago. 'He's gone in the house,' she said, 'to rescue his books. Oh, won't somebody go in and save him?' So Pete Cedarwall — he was the only one who believed that the kid might really be in the house — Pete wet a handkerchief and tied it around his mouth and nose, and went in. The house was full of smoke. Nobody downstairs. The stairs was beginning to burn, but he went up — and there he found him, with a big armful of books.

"Yes, sir, rescuing his precious books! 'Come outa that!' says Pete. 'Just a minute,' says Felix, 'I think there's another one.' And by God, Pete just had to pick him up, books and all, and carry him downstairs. And when they got outside his mother started to cry over him, but he paid no attention, he just sat down and counted his books — to make sure that they were all there. 'See here,' says

Pete, 'now you're out, you stay out! Understand? Don't you go back in that house on no consideration. I've done all the rescuing I feel like today.' And the kid says, 'It's all right,' he says, 'the one I was looking for is here after all. I don't need to go back.'

"And by the Lord Harry, I believe if he hadn't had that there book he was looking for, he'd have gone back to get it in spite of hell and all!"

There was an appreciative murmur, mingled with loud laughter, from the crowd, waking Felix from the spell which this story had laid upon him. The story-teller began again, repeating his climax. "Yes sir, he'd have gone right in to that burning house —"

Felix walked away from the crowd, suddenly flushed with deep anger and shame. He realized that the crowd was laughing at him for being a fool. He wanted to go back and shout at them that it was not true, that it was all a lie. But he knew these people would not believe him. They believed the story. Of course they did. Felix, while he listened, had almost believed it himself. . . .

The little Farrell boy ran after him; he had stayed to hear the end of the story — the imaginative barber had finally finished it off with a new episode, in which Felix had struggled with his rescuer on being brought out of the house, trying to go back again after the missing book. This effort to paint the lily had aroused doubts in the hitherto credulous young Farrell. "He says you tried to go back again, Felix! Is that so, Felix? I didn't see you try to go back *again*."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Felix angrily. "You know perfectly well that the whole thing's a lie!"

"Well, I didn't see you try to go back again the second time," conceded the boy.

"You didn't see me go in the first time either, did you? You didn't see Pete Cedarwall dragging me out, did you?"

The boy made a reluctant adjustment of the facts to the story. "Well," he said, "I saw you right afterwards!"

The boy had been there all the time. And yet he believed

Tom Jenkins' story. Felix turned and walked away in disgust. When the boy started to follow him, he shouted, "Go away! You're a little idiot! Don't you dare tag after me, or I'll slap your face." . . . On the way home, another boy stopped him to ask about the alleged rescue, and Felix bitterly refused to talk to him. But when in front of the Farrell place one of the neighbours saw him and said, in a tone that seemed to show admiration of Felix's imaginary exploit, "Well Felix, you got your books anyhow, didn't you?"— Felix only hung his head and muttered something unintelligible, and then ran into the house.

He did not say anything about the story to his parents, and was relieved that they did not speak of it. He hoped they had not heard it, for he was afraid his father would guy him about it. . . . He was curiously distressed and yet elated, to be the subject of so much public comment. There was intoxication as well as pain in the thought of this story about him going from mouth to mouth. And that night in bed Felix lay awake a long time and rehearsed the story to himself, improving a little on Tom Jenkins' version. It fascinated him. He knew how absurd, as well as untrue, the story was. He did not own a book that he would have lifted a finger to save. The books he owned had long since been read and re-read, gutted of their contents and thrown aside. The only books for which he really cared at all were newly-borrowed and still unread or half-read, books from the library. And as for risking his life to save a library book! — that was preposterous. But these considerations of fact were swamped by the tide of emotional truth in the story. He felt queerly proud of it, just as though it really had been true. It represented, perhaps, a thing he *might* have done. . . .

He imagined the scene. Himself, blinded by smoke, groping on the shelf for his beloved books, unheeding the danger, until seized by the strong arm of Pete Cedarwall. He tasted the smoke in his throat, felt it in his eyes, knew the feel of the floor as he stumbled and fell and rose again, the weight

of the books clasped under his arm, the blind passionate desire to save those books, all he owned and all he cared for, from destruction. . . .

The next day, when he was first asked about the rescue, he denied it coldly. But when he had been asked about it for the tenth time, he ceased to deny it, and only stood silent, abashed, ashamed — and pleased.

2

School opened soon, but after the first week Felix caught a cold that kept him at home for a month. When he went back, he was much worried for fear he would be "behind" the others in their studies. But to his surprise it seemed as though things had stood still while he was away. In three days he learned all that he had missed. He looked about at the desks and the blackboards with an air of superiority, of arrogant contempt. Never again would he be afraid of anything in school.

Henceforth he had many idle hours in the schoolroom. He spent his time in dreaming, and continued to get high marks — in everything except arithmetic, in which he could not force himself to take the slightest interest. The problems were all too utterly alien to his curiosity. How many yards of calico could you buy for $1.38 at 11½ cents a yard? Felix did not care. He did not want to buy calico.

One day as he sat dreaming in school in the midst of a study hour, there came to him a curious fantasy. He had been working at his arithmetic problems, and wishing that he had the little book in the teacher's desk in which the answers to these problems were printed. It would be interesting to have a book in which there were answers to everything. . . . A magic book, which contained every secret. And as he dreamed, he saw himself, only dressed like a prince in a fairy-tale, carrying that magic book (a great big book, written in a strange language that ordinary people did not understand, and illustrated with coloured pictures) — carrying it home . . . no, to a cave . . . no, to a castle

. . . no, to a little house in the woods that nobody knew anything about. It had an attic, and that was where he kept his book, and where he sat and read it. He left it there, in a big trunk, and went away. And while he was gone, his enemy came and tried to find the book. But he could not find it, because Felix had hidden it away too securely. So his enemy, in a rage, set fire to the house and ran away. And then Felix came home, and saw the smoke, and rushed into the house to rescue his magic book. He felt the smoke in his eyes, and the weight of the great book under his arm as he stumbled blindly down the stairs to safety. . . .

But at this moment he became conscious that the eyes of the teacher were on him, so he hastily picked up a pencil and pretended to be doing his arithmetic. But he could not keep his mind on the problem, so he started to draw a picture. It was a picture of the little house in the woods. But the picture was no good, so he stopped. Yet he could not go back to calico at 11½ cents a yard. He found himself writing the story he had been making up to himself. "The Prince," he wrote, "had a magic book." Words came to him, and he wrote feverishly. He was unprepared to recite his lesson when the time came, but he did not care. That night at home he finished the story, staying up till midnight. His mother supposed he was working on his lessons. After finishing it, he lay awake a long time, thrilled with a strange new joy.

The intoxication of it lasted many days. His story was with him always. Only he did not call it a story, he called it a "piece." He would take it out of his pocket and read it to himself on the way to school, or hide it behind a book at his desk, saying it over and over until he knew it by heart.

At last the pleasure of it wore away, and he began to plan to renew that pleasure. He scratched down things that came into his mind at odd times, and saved them. But they were mere fragments. He took them out in his study hours and at home at night, and puzzled and frowned over them,

wondering how to go on, what to say next. Then one day his teacher kept him after school because he had not known his lesson, and gently rebuked him. "You have been such a good scholar, Felix," she said. "I don't know what is getting over you. What is it you are always thinking about when you should be studying? Tell me."

Felix melted under her kind glance, and mumbled, "Stories."

"Stories? The stories you read? What are they?" She suspected the hypnotic influence of Nick Carter.

"No," said Felix, beginning to be sorry that he had told her.

"What is it, then?" She sat down in the seat beside him, and put her arm about his shoulders. "Tell me, dear."

"Stories I want to write," whispered Felix, ashamed and fearful, but compelled by her kindness to confess.

"Oh," she said. "Stories you want to write. So you want to write stories. That is nice. What do you want to write about?"

"I don't know," said Felix gloomily. "That's the trouble. I just want to write."

"Oh, I see. You want to write stories, but you don't know what to write about. Well, let's see. Why don't you write about a little boy who went to school and —"

"I don't want to write about little boys," said Felix uncomfortably.

"Would you like to write about history? There are lots of interesting things in history to write about."

"I — I don't think so," said Felix.

"Well, I'll tell you. You just look at some story-books, and see if you can't find something to write about in them. And you can see from the books how people write stories, too; and maybe that will make it easier for you. And when you find what you want to write about, you start in, and write a fine story. And when you get it finished, you will bring it to me and let me read it. Won't you? And

that will be all right — only you must do it out of school hours. You mustn't neglect your lessons, you know. I think you will write a fine story, and I know you will be my nicest scholar again." She rose. "Is that a bargain?"

"Yes'm," said Felix, and blushing took the hand which she held out to him.

3

He had always admired Miss Croly, the teacher, but now he felt almost worshipful of her. He went home determined to have all his lessons for ever afterward, and to write a story she would be proud of. He began to look through books for something to write about. He did not find anything, but he did begin to notice how they were written. He realized for the first time that the books which he read were very long. His "piece" had been very insignificant in comparison to them. He must write a long story — a book. It would be hard to do — but nothing less, he felt, would justify Miss Croly's confidence in him. He examined carefully a novel by Charles Garvice which he had just been reading. It had twenty chapters. Well, that did not seem so terribly long, after all. He would have twenty chapters in his book. How many people should he have in it? He began to count the characters in the Garvice novel, setting down their names. He grew discouraged when he found that the list mounted up to forty before he was half way through the book. He thought this over, and decided that it was not really necessary to have so many people. He would limit himself to thirty — fifteen men and fifteen women. He began choosing names for these characters, looking in various books and in the "list of Christian names" in the back of the big dictionary at school. He did not know what he would do with all these characters, but it was fun to choose names for them. "Roxana Savage. Karl Koenig. Lieutenant George Maynard. Marie Despard. The Duc de Rossignac. Celia Blythe. . . ." But what to do with them? An idea came to Felix. He

might send them all up in a balloon, a great balloon invented by Karl Koenig, and something would go wrong with the balloon so that they could not come down, and it would drift over to China? Africa? a desert island? Yes, a desert island, and then all the rest of the characters could be savages and pirates. Perhaps the hero, Lieutenant George Maynard, would not be on the lost balloon, and he would have to set out in search of Celia, the heroine. And perhaps the inventor, Karl Koenig, was a villain, and had done it on purpose in order to get Celia into his power. Perhaps Roxana Savage was in love with him, and would help to foil his plot. And Marie Despard . . . there were great possibilities in a girl with that name. But all those details could be settled later. Suddenly Felix decided on a title. "The Tropic of Capricorn." Feeling that he had made a start, he bought a tablet, the largest he could find in the stationery store, and set down in the middle of the first page, just as in the books he had been reading, "The Tropic of Capricorn. A Novel. By Felix Fay." At the top of the second page he wrote neatly: "Chapter I."

All this was done conscientiously outside of school, except the search for names in the back of the big dictionary, which he conducted at recess-time. He studied his lessons faithfully, and recited them to Miss Croly's complete approval. But that did not take up all his time. He felt in duty bound not to write on his book at school; but he could not help dreaming about it. And since his story was still too vague and indefinite to think about with satisfaction, he began instead to dream of himself as a story-writer. In his dreams he finished this story and took it to Miss Croly, and was praised for it, and began another, and finished that, until in imagination he was the author of a dozen books, of which he had invented only the titles. This dream had its fascination, and he became very proud of his imaginary works. He felt himself to be a very wonderful person.

One day at recess, when the other boys were chinning themselves twelve times in succession on the limb of an old

tree in the schoolyard, and Felix could do it only twice without touching his feet to the ground, he was laughed at. He had made himself indifferent to the occasional careless taunt at his lack of physical prowess, but sometimes it hurt. This time the tears came to his eyes, and he walked off, saying to himself, "I don't care! I don't care! I can do something they can't do. I can write books."

That thought gave him compensation thenceforth for all the hurts and humiliations of the schoolyard. He ceased even to try to compete with the other boys, and stalked apart. They could not write books; and he could; and some day they would realize it! . . . He saw himself, in a glowing vision of the future, coming back to Maple as a famous man, and being pointed out on the streets. "He was born here," they would say.

He began to take an interest in the question of his birthplace. He had had pointed out to him, as the house in which he was born, the great brown-painted frame building now known as Blair's Boarding-House, where some of the mill-hands lived, and which served perforce as a hotel for the infrequent drummers who came to Maple. Felix was vaguely disappointed in it as a birthplace. He felt that he should have been born in a log-cabin, like Lincoln. There was only one log-cabin in Maple, and he went out of his way several times to look at it, and stared curiously at the barefooted old Irishwoman who lived there. Then he went back to Blair's Boarding-House, and tried to reconcile himself to it.

Gradually he came to yield it a certain deference. And one morning, on his eleventh birthday, perhaps unconsciously by way of acknowledging it, he wrote his name all along the side of the house in large letters with a piece of chalk.

4

That happened on his way to school. And that afternoon it happened that the principal of the school, a tall, rubber-heeled man who liked to catch somebody doing something

wrong and make an example of him, visited the room. The writing exercise was in progress. Felix had finished it long since, and sat dreaming of his future. He was picturing his return, as a famous man, to Maple. The people of the town had put a brass plate on the corner of Blair's Boarding-House, just as he had read about in books in similar cases, proclaiming the honour he had done the town by being born there. And as he dreamed, he unconsciously wrote on his tablet, "Felix Fay, the Great Novelist, was born here, May 10, 1886."

The principal was softly making the rounds of the room. Felix had not seen him enter, and was not aware of his presence until he saw the tall shape leaning over his shoulder, looking at his tablet. Felix was proud of his handwriting, and he pushed the writing exercise over for the principal to see. But the principal continued to look at the tablet. He had seen the name on the side of Blair's Boarding-House that noon, and now he had found the culprit.

"Are you Felix Fay?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you write your name on the side of Blair's Boarding-House?"

The question came like an earthquake. Felix had forgotten all about it. Now he realized that he had committed a crime in thus desecrating the civic landscape.

"Yes, sir," he said faintly.

"What did you do that for?" the principal asked sternly.

At that moment Felix became conscious of the tell-tale words written on the paper before him. He blushed all over. Those words seemed to him a naked revelation of all his secret thoughts. He wanted to destroy the paper, but he could not make a movement.

"I don't know," he said, dully.

"You don't know?" repeated the torturer. "You must be very proud of your name." He took up the tablet on which the name was written. "What's this?" he exclaimed, looking at it more closely.

Felix shrank in his clothes, while the Principal read it over carefully to himself. Then he turned to Felix.

"I want you," he said bitingly, "to show the room what you have been doing instead of writing your lesson.—Write that on the board three times."

Miss Croly, the teacher, flushed angrily, and made a protesting gesture.

As one under sentence of death, pale, but rigid to conceal his trembling, Felix walked slowly to the blackboard, faced the whole room with its hundred staring eyes, lifted his head proudly, turned to the blackboard and wrote the offending sentence slowly in large defiant letters.

Then he crumbled the chalk between his fingers, let it drop to the floor, and walked back to his seat.

There was a hush all over the room. Nobody knew what it meant. Felix's bearing was so little like that of a culprit that it did not seem that they were intended to laugh at his discomfiture. The principal was embarrassed. "That," he said finally, "is what is known as egotism," and went out.

Miss Croly hastily called the arithmetic class, and herself erased from the blackboard the words that Felix had written. Felix left the room, took his cap, and hurried to Blair's Boarding-House, trembling with rage and shame. Ignoring the people about, he commenced to rub out his name, with his handkerchief, his cap, his coat sleeve, his bare hands. The letters seemed to have grown gigantic, overtopping his own height, blazoning his vain dreams to the world. A crowd began to gather. He stopped suddenly and ran home.

That night a kindly rain came and washed the offending letters from the wall. They were not there to reproach Felix when he went to school the next day. The incident was closed. Felix, sleeplessly tossing in bed in feverish torment, had resolved over and over again never to write another line.

VI The Stranger Sex

I

IN the world in which Felix lived, girls were a race apart. Earlier, while his sister Ann had been going to school, they had come to the house occasionally — a set of wild tormentors like herself, whose silly and teasing remarks he haughtily ignored. There was at school a boys' playground and a girls', and the two tribes seldom mixed. Felix had never become acquainted with any girl-child of his own age.

He had, it is true, walked to school a few times with a pretty, dark-eyed little girl who lived in his own neighbourhood. He had overtaken her the first time by accident, and accompanied her out of some notion of politeness. But he liked her because she was quiet — unlike his sister and her rowdy friends; and he began to linger about his door waiting for her to come along. This did not escape the notice of his family, and soon they began to tease him about her. "How's your little sweetheart?" his father would ask with mocking seriousness. And his sister would sing:

"Felix's mad and I'm glad,
And I know what will please him —
A bottle of wine to make him shine,
And Lucy Day to squeeze him!"

But it was not so much these outrageous mockeries, as the pretended seriousness with which the others of his family took the relationship, that alarmed. They would say, at the supper-table, "Well, Felix is growing up. He's got a sweetheart already. I suppose he'll be staying out late at night, next!" There was an appalling innuendo in such remarks for Felix. He began to realize that something

further was expected of him. These jokes were maddening and terrifying; what was this mysterious realm into which he had unwittingly intruded? Could not a fellow walk to school with a girl once or twice without — What did they expect of him? *What did Lucy expect of him?* That was a terrible thought. Perhaps she was already considering him ridiculous, and laughing at him behind his back because he did not know how to behave.

He remembered the game of Postoffice at a children's party to which he had gone, and how one of the little boys had called out and kissed again and again, amidst much badinage, the same little girl. He would probably have to take her to parties, and behave like that: and the prospect dismayed him infinitely. . . . What he had read about love in books did not occur to his mind in this connection; that was of a different world. Painfully he groped among the thorny realities, trying to find a path. . . . Yes, and he would have to take her home from the party. Then he would have to stand there by the gate and talk to her — a long time. And then — Oh yes, this especially! — he would have to "treat" her. Buy her candy and little presents. His mother had already suggested this to him. When he had demanded a nickel for a new tablet, she asked him kindly if he didn't want another nickel to buy candy for "somebody." He knew well enough whom it was she meant by "somebody," and he drew back his eagerly outstretched hand and put it behind him, and hung his head.

Buying her presents — that was the final impossibility. He never had any money. He never treated anybody. He hated to let any of the little boys treat him, because they expected you to treat them back. Where was he to get the money to buy Lucy candy? Come to his mother every time and ask for it? No. Besides, he knew she did not have much to give. They were poor. Why, he had to wear his big brothers' clothes, made over. He could not buy presents for girls. If that was what she was expecting —

Or was it the kissing? He flushed when he thought of

it. He had never even so much as touched her. Did she, perhaps, consider him a ninny?

Into the faint and shy beginnings of his acquaintanceship with this little girl, these suggestions of a vast system of technical adult behaviour came with a rude shock. He stopped walking to school with Lucy Day — he kept inside the house until she had lingeringly passed, and then he hurried to school by another road. Soon he had managed to put her out of his consciousness.

He had never talked about girls, and seldom listened to conversation about them. The more lurid references to sex, which occasionally met his ears on the playground, he ignored with the hauteur of shyness. He knew more about the subject scientifically than the other children, having gained much recondite knowledge from the old "doctor-book" in the attic which his mother had once taken away from him. He stood scornfully aloof from coarseness of speech; but nevertheless the suggestions of such speech contributed to his diffidence with regard to girls. They were beings whom he did not know just how he ought to deal with, and hence a part of the mysterious and troublesome real world which he feared and disliked. . . . He preferred the gorgeous fantasies which were unrolled for him in the pages of books.

He believed in these books without any question of their truth in the outside world in which he lived with so much difficulty and embarrassment. His imagination responded freely to the theme of sex as he found it in books. He enjoyed the frank sensuality of Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis" without being made in the least more conscious of the girls who sat in the same room at school.

It was customary, at school, for boys to sit with boys, and girls with girls. But sometimes, during a temporary shortage of seating-room, it became necessary to put a boy and a girl together for the day. Once Felix was assigned to sit with a girl. He accepted the arrangement calmly, but the girl blushed and giggled until the teacher had to lecture

her on "false modesty." Felix wondered why she was making such a fuss about it. He had been reading with great interest a highly coloured romance which dealt with the most adult relationships of the sexes; but he regarded the blushing miss at his side with complete emotional unconcern.

He had recently conceived a romantic passion for Miss Croly, the teacher who had taken his part against the principal. He had been alienated from her for a while after that incident, because of some obscure feeling that she had betrayed him into his painful humiliation that day at school. But as she continued to be kind, he succumbed again to her charm, and became troubled by a desire to serve her. It was from her that he had his first lesson in manners. She asked him to stay after school one afternoon, and said to him, "Felix, you are getting to be quite grown up, and you will have to behave as grown-up people do in certain ways. For instance, when you meet me on the street, I want you to tip your cap to me. Will you remember?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Felix, blushing that he should have been so delinquent in this duty as to require instruction. He was hurrying off, when she had an inspiration and called him back. "I want to tell you why you must do this, Felix," she said.

"Yes, ma'am," said Felix.

"In the story-books you read," she said, "you remember that men bow to ladies, and take off their casques — casques with plumes to them, Felix!"— his eyes lighted up, and she saw that she had his inward attention —"and bow low, casque in hand, until the plume sweeps the ground!" She made the gesture, grandly and gracefully, and Felix loved her for it.

"In those days, Felix," she went on, "men were always fighting, and so they had to wear armour to protect themselves. But men do not fight women — they fight *for* them. And so, when a knight met a lady, he took off his helmet and bowed, to show that he was ready to serve her. 'At your

service, milady!'"— and she made the grand gesture again.

"Nowadays," she continued, "men do not fight each other, and so they do not wear armour. But women still need to be protected and served, and so when a gentleman meets a lady he takes off his hat, or touches his cap, to show that he is ready to serve her. Now you understand, don't you, Felix?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Felix, and went home with a heroic glow in his heart.

Yet when he met Miss Croly in the street next day, it took all his courage to make that simple gesture. When first he saw her, he had a moment of wild panic, and thought of turning back and going the other way, or of looking down and pretending that he did not see her. But he clenched his teeth and approached his doom heroically. When? now? — no, not yet — wait till she is a little nearer — now! Now, you fool! Quick! —

She smiled. "How do you do, Felix!" And Felix raised his paralyzed arm to his cap, gave the visor a little twitch with numb fingers, and hurried on past with all the emotions of one who has just undergone a painful death. . . . After that first time it was easier.

He was always hanging around her desk, awaiting the opportunity to perform the service of which this painful gesture was the symbolic promise. At last the opportunity came. One afternoon Miss Croly had to stay to coach some backward pupils, and she asked Felix to take a note to her sister at the candy store. Felix took the note and hastened there eagerly.

But something went wrong. Miss Croly's sister was not at the candy store. She had gone home, but would probably be back soon. Didn't he want to leave the note? No — he would not surrender it. Instead, he inquired the way to her home, and carried it there, a distance of two miles. On the way, he wondered if he were not doing something foolish and uncalled-for. But even so it was a folly of which he felt a little proud. Miss Croly had said, "Give

it to my sister," and how should he know that some one else would do?

If only he knew what was in the note! . . . But all his knightly code of morals forbade him to open and read it. He trudged on to the girl's home.

But she was not there. She had left for the store, they said. Hadn't he passed her on the way? Doubtless he had, Felix said to himself — and he, like a fool, had not seen her. A fine person he was to get to do an errand! Disconsolate but grimly determined, he went back to the store.

She had not yet arrived. . . . Felix did not know what to do, and was just shamefacedly starting back to the school to report failure, when she came up. He triumphantly delivered the missive. She opened it. Felix hoped that it was something very important, to justify his pains. "Oh, she wants some marshmallows. Just give it to the girl inside."

So, at last — realizing bitterly that anybody with any sense would have done the right thing and handed in the note at the candy store an hour ago — he started back to school with the marshmallows. On the way he comforted himself with the thought that at any rate he had stuck it out. He was beginning to admire himself a little when he reached the school-room. It was empty. . . . Miss Croly had gone home, the janitor said.

This was too terrible. There was just one chance to save the situation. He knew that he would not dare come to school and face her tomorrow if he did not get the candy to her now. And he knew that he would never have the courage to knock at her door and deliver it to her in the presence of her family. He must overtake her before she reached home. He started running as fast as he could.

At last he saw her in the distance. There was a pain in his side, and he was out of breath. He could not approach her this way. He slowed down, recovered his breath, and then caught up with her in an easy walk. "Oh, Miss Croly!" he called.

She turned. "Oh, it's you, Felix! And you have the candy! You nice boy! I left school earlier than I intended, and I wondered what you would think of me for sending you on a wild-goose-chase. It was very nice of you to think of bringing them to me, after you found I wasn't at school." She had stopped at the store, and heard the story of Felix's wanderings, and been much amused; but Felix did not realize this, and her words were a magic salve to his wounded egotism. "Won't you have one?"

"Thank you," said Felix, and took one. Then he realized that he had not tipped his cap to her. So he did so, and was off. . . .

That nightmare was over; and Felix had no intention of having any such thing happen again. He knew now that he had no aptitude for the service of ladies fair; and his knightly mood, submerged in his old shyness, soon disappeared.

2

Except for such brief interludes, he had been untouched by the influence of the other sex. And he was in a mood remote from any consciousness of women as living beings, when one of them entered quite definitely into his life, in the summer of his twelfth year.

Her name was Rose.

The Fay family had moved again that spring, into part of a house otherwise inhabited by an old man and his granddaughter. Old Mr. Henderson was a gardener, and there were greenhouses and glass-covered hot-beds, and other georgic mysteries about the place, in which Felix took, as was his custom, no interest whatever. Rose, who was about fifteen years old, helped her grandfather at his work; and though Felix did not take any interest in her either, he saw her, busy with watering-pot or spray-pump, at morning or evening — a tall, quiet, black-eyed girl just beginning to outgrow the lankiness of adolescence.

The only way that either of these people impinged on

Felix's consciousness was by their curious habit of praying aloud every night before they went to sleep. Their voices sounded clearly through the partitions. First, in a farther room, the old man would pray, earnestly and at great length; and then, in the room next to the one in which Felix himself slept, the girl would recite the Lord's Prayer — kneeling, as Felix surmised, on the floor beside her bed. Then the old man would call out in deep tones, "Good night, Rosie," and the girl would reply, "Sweet dreams, grandpa!" The Fays were not a praying family, and the unusualness of this custom made a brief impression on Felix; and then he paid no more attention to it.

There was something else to engage Felix's interest.

There was a trap-door in the ceiling of his bedroom, leading undoubtedly to an attic; the regular staircase to this attic must presumably be on the Henderson side of the house — an arrangement which Felix considered unfortunate. For attics are places where old books may be found. Felix studied the trap-door speculatively for many mornings before he got out of bed. A step-ladder would reach it — but there wasn't any step-ladder. . . . He considered other ways and means.

One Sunday, a week after school had closed for the summer, he carried out his plan. First he moved the bedstead out a foot or so from the wall, so that its tall wooden headboard stood directly under the trap-door. Then he moved the tall chest of drawers a little nearer to the bedstead. A chair in front of the chest of drawers completed the ladder. Standing precariously on the top of the headboard, with one hand grasping the picture-moulding for support, he was able to push the trap-door aside. A quantity of accumulated dust fell down into his eyes and into his open mouth; but this only spurred him to renewed enterprise. Loosing his hold upon the picture-moulding, he clutched the edge of the opening with both hands, and swung himself free from his foothold. Felix had always been rather timid and clumsy at climbing, but now that there was a real reason for climb-

ing, he found himself unafraid and sufficiently expert. A single effort drew him up to the floor of the attic. He sat down, spat out the dust, blinked his eyes, and looked about in the gloom. Sure enough, there was discernible the outline of an old trunk. It proved to be unlocked — and to contain books.

It further developed that if one opened the shutters of the gable window, and rubbed the dust from the window-panes with one's sleeve, the place became light enough to read in. Felix examined the books. They were mostly government reports on methods of gardening, with realistic coloured photographs of caterpillars and insects. But Felix kept on searching, and turned up three books which promised to be interesting. They were called "Percy's Reliques," "The Confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau," and "The Book of Mormon."

Felix did not wonder how these books came to be in the attic of a house inhabited by an old gardener who prayed aloud every night before he went to bed. Their presence here adumbrated no mystery to him. Besides, it was not his habit to make inquiries concerning the events of the real world. He took things as he found them. He sat on the floor by the window, with his back against the trunk, and read. Twilight found him deep in the adventures of the gods and demi-gods of "The Book of Mormon."

He debated whether to take the books down with him. It was pleasant to have a secret place where he could read undisturbed. So he hung, and dropped, as unobstrusively as possible, upon the bed. The trap-door, he discovered, could be coaxed back almost into place with a broom-handle, so as to leave no trace of the adventure. . . . The next morning he came back, by a daring arrangement which left the furniture almost in its natural position; and closing the trap-door after him, dipped into Percy's "Reliques" and forgot the world.

3

He had been making the attic his trysting-place for ten days, and was immersed one afternoon in the "Confessions" of Rousseau, when suddenly there was a noise at the door by which the attic was entered from the Henderson side of the house. Felix waited silently, holding his breath. There was no use trying to get down, now.— The lock rattled, a bolt shot back, and the girl entered.

"Oh," she said, standing in the doorway, "so it's you!"

"Yes," said Felix.

She closed the door behind her, and came up to him. "I heard funny noises," she said, "and wondered if it was the rats." She smiled. "How did you get in?"

He explained.

"What are you doing?"

"Reading," he said.

She looked at him a moment silently, and then dusted off the corner of the trunk with her apron, and sat down. "It's dusty here, isn't it!" she said.

"Yes," he agreed, wishing she would go. But she sat waiting silently, and after a minute said, "Go on reading."

He obeyed, and turned his attention again to the book, but presently she exclaimed, "Oh, I meant read to *me!*"

"Oh," he said. "All right." He read a page aloud, and then looked up in a little embarrassment, for her presence made him vaguely aware that what he was reading was not the sort of thing that is contained in books intended for young people. But, looking at him with grave eyes, she said, "I like it. Go on."

His embarrassment vanished, and he read on for half an hour. Then he paused, and pushed the book away for a moment, stirring his cramped legs.

"Is that the end of the chapter?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"Then let's leave it until tomorrow, and go outdoors." She jumped up.

"Oh, all right," he said, and rose.

"Let's see how you get down," she demanded. He started to descend. She knelt and watched, quietly, without expressing any obtrusive concern for his safety. He dropped lightly to the bed.

"All right?" she called, looking down at him. "I'll meet you at the other end of the lot."

She smiled, and the trap-door closed.

4

Felix had not particularly noticed her while they had been together, but as he went into the sunlight he had a sudden memory picture of the dark garret, and of the listening girl, calm and impassive, seated on the trunk, and of himself crouched beside her in the patch of sunlight that filtered through the dusty window-panes, making the open pages of the book on his lap the brightest spot in the room. He saw himself with his hair falling into his eyes, brushing it back with an unconscious movement; and the girl, sitting erect and quiet, with dark, wide-open, unwavering eyes. It startled him, this picture; but it vanished in a moment when she met him at the end of the lot. She was simply Rose, old Henderson's granddaughter.

"It's nicer outdoors," she said. "Isn't it!"

"Yes," he vaguely agreed, wondering why he had said he would go.

"We are going to Barker's Woods," she informed him.

They walked along together silently. He had begun to think about something else when she commenced to tell him about her grandfather's business, which was not doing well. Felix scarcely listened. They reached the wood, a deserted place a mile or so away, and sat down on the grass.

"Tell me a story," she said.

"What kind of story?" he asked.

"Any kind. I like stories."

He looked at her, bored and incredulous. He knew what girls were like — or, at least, what they were not like. They

did not mean what they said when they talked like that. They were always talking like that. They did it to get around you. They pretended to want to do what you were doing, but it always ended by your doing what they wanted to do. He had wanted to read in the garret, and now he found himself here in the woods with this girl. She was only pretending when she said, "Tell me a story."— All this flowed through the back of his mind, an uneasy stream of suspicion, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Really, I do want to hear a story," said the girl. "And when you've told one, then I'll do something, too!"

His attitude changed. If she offered something in return for his story, then perhaps it was true — perhaps she liked stories in the same way that he did. . . . "What will you do?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know. I'll think of something. You go ahead with your story. And make it a good one!"

Here was a challenge. He met it with a grotesque fantasy of Hugo's, the story of "The Man Who Laughs." Both of them sat motionless there on the grass in the afternoon shade and sun while the quaint and gorgeous pattern of that fiction was unrolled. At the end she sighed. "Is that all?" she asked.

"Yes."

"You tell stories beautifully!"

Felix's spirit, starved for praise, fed on the light of appreciation in her eyes. He knew now that he liked her. After a while he reminded her, "Now it's your turn."

She rose. Felix was prepared to admire, but he was not prepared for what happened. For in an instant a transformation took place, which changed this lanky, rather awkward girl whom he had seen a hundred times, into a new person — a creature strangely and more than humanly beautiful. It began with the way she rose to her feet. It was with such a movement as he had never before seen — a single miraculously graceful movement, unassisted by her hands; she seemed merely to twist her legs beneath her, and

then be lifted by some mysterious power up from the ground, as lightly as a curl of smoke. And once on her feet she had seemed to grow divinely tall. She stood with a bearing that seemed to Felix, as he lay there staring incredulously up at her, to belong to goddess or fairy or some Princess of his childhood's Arabian Nights. She stood quite still, leaning forward a little, with head thrown back; one arm was bent, the hand shut and pressed against her bosom, the other arm held a little stiffly out from her side, the fingers spread in a gesture which, tiny as it was, seemed meant to command vast crowds to quiet; behind her was the trunk of an old oak, and the round top of the hill. She began to speak what must have been, though Felix did not know, words from some forgotten play:

"My lords and gentlemen, I cry you mercy!
You have your will of us, we live to please you,
We wait upon your laughter and your tears,
We are your playthings — toys are we, very toys!
When you are weary of us, we are thrown aside
And lie forgotten in Time's dustbin. Yet
For all that, we are masters of you still.
You cannot do without us, though you try!
The time will come when you will know it is not
Beggars and trick-mongers that you have banished,
But the high gods, who even in our shapes
Do teach you, merrily and quaintly enough,
That there are things beyond your ignorance."

From time to time as she spoke, there had peered out from beneath the dignity of the play-acting girl an even stranger mischievous, elvish quality; and as she finished, she changed again: whipping open the little fan she had brought with her to the wood, she stooped toward him, clasping her skirts in one hand, and, looking at him roguishly from behind her fan, sang a quaint and dancingly rhyming song which Felix had never heard, about "three little maids from school." . . . Then suddenly she straightened herself, dropped her fan, and with rigidly erect and scornful body, broke into Isabella's speech from "Measure for Measure," ending,—

"But man, proud man,
Dressed in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep."

One would have been certain that she had been reared, not by a pious grandfather, but among actor-folk. Felix was, however, incapable of any such thought. He only worshipped. "You're wonderful!" he cried.

The girl flushed in her turn. "Do you really like it?" she asked. "My mother taught me. I know lots of things like that."

But Felix did not ask about her mother. He was amazed and grateful, to have *her*. . . . And it occurred to him, in a vivid and intoxicating flash, that they were people who could give to each other the things they valued — and not be laughed at. His stories, her play-acting. . . . He felt lifted with her high above the world. . . .

Rose rolled over on the grass. "It would be nice if we could build a fire and cook our supper here," she said.

"Yes," assented Felix. "I've never done that. I suppose it is nice."

"I've never done it either," she confessed. "Let's, sometime!" She began to puzzle out a solution of the practical difficulties. "I've got to get dinner for my grandfather. But we'll do it afterward. I'll save a piece of meat and some coffee."

Felix joined with eagerness in her plans.

"Have you got a knife?" she asked irrelevantly.

"Yes."

"Give it to me. I want to make a whistle."

He gave it to her, and she cut off a slim smooth branch and started to work. It was not the proper season for making whistles, however, and the bark refused to slip from the wood. Felix, as a boy, ought to have known what was the trouble, but he didn't. When she had quite elaborately failed, he tried too, with no more success.

"I'm no good at making things," he confessed, throwing away the bewhittled stick, and looking at her to see the effect of his words.

"Neither am I," she laughed.

"I can't even play marbles," he said, "that is, not well enough to count. Nor baseball, nor any of those things." Let there be no false pretences!

"I think games are silly," she said.

She had passed the test triumphantly!

"Now I've got to go home and get grandpa's dinner," she said.

They walked back almost silently, but with the sense of a deeply established comradeship.

"That garret is awfully dirty," she said just before they parted. "I'm going to fix it up tomorrow."

VII The Hand of Reality

I

THE next morning Felix awoke bewilderedly from a disconcerting dream — a very curious dream, in which he seemed to have awakened and discovered that the events of the last two weeks — the garret, the books, the girl — were only a dream! Awaking, now, he was puzzled to disentangle reality and dream. Then he heard sounds overhead. Rose was there "fixing it up." So it was true!

It was not until some hours later that he was able to make his ascent unobserved. He found the place transformed. The floor had been swept and scrubbed, and some rag-rugs and sofa-pillows were spread upon it. The window-panes, really clean, let in a flood of daylight. And there was a bowl of fresh-roasted buttered popcorn standing in the midst of it all.

Felix was surprised and strangely pleased. He had grown to dislike his mother's perpetual attempts to "make him comfortable"; it was intolerable to have her for ever trying to wait on him. She was his willing slave; and he felt the bitter truth of that saying which asserts that the chain which ties the slave to the master also ties the master to the slave. He was tired of having her eyes follow him around the room anxiously, and then of hearing her ask, "What are you looking for, Felix?" What difference did it make, he would ask himself savagely, what he was looking for: couldn't she let him alone? No, apparently not. And always when he left the house, "Where are you going, Felix?" . . . He had liked the garret because it was so different from home. If his mother had discovered his hiding-place, and offered to clean and furnish it for him,

he would have resented her offer as a hateful intrusion. But now that Rose had done the same thing, he was delighted. Somehow it made him think of the Arabian Nights. He sat down and waited impatiently for Rose to appear.

She came at last. "How do you like it?"

"Fine!" He did not say that it was like the Arabian Nights. But she seemed content with monosyllabic approval. She sat down on the other side of the bowl, and they ate pop-corn.

"Do you like these books?" she asked.

"Yes. Why?"

"They were my mother's. See!" She opened the "Confessions" and showed him, written on the fly-leaf, the name "Rose Talbot."—"That was her maiden name. She was an actress. She had a lot of plays, too, but my grandfather burned them all up."

"Oh," said Felix. It did not occur to him that here was a story which might be even more interesting than the one they were reading. He waited a moment, and then, as she did not continue, he took up the book and opened it to the place where they had left off yesterday. "Shall I go on reading?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," she said. . . .

That afternoon they went to the woods again, and made more plans for their bonfire supper.

2

The bonfire supper did not come off for several weeks, however, and in the meantime they met every day in the garret or in the wood. In spite of their mutual confession of dislike for games, they invented and played games of the most elaborate sort, with an unabashed childishness — pretending to be castaways on a desert island, prisoners of the Indians, magicians and kings and queens in the Arabian Nights. They dramatized these situations to the utmost, and made long speeches to each other and to imaginary personages. He thought her quite wonderful in these

games. The rôle in which she most thrilled him was as the Spanish princess, captured by the Aztecs, and about to be sacrificed to a god with an unpronounceable name. She made a very long and beautiful speech to her tormentors, and recited some poetry that she said was from a play of Shakespeare's — her mother had taught it to her when she was a very little girl. At the final moment, just when she was about to be dragged away to the fatal altar, the chief of a strange tribe of wandering Indians who had come in with his companions, and demanded the privilege of witnessing the ceremony, tore off his feathered head-dress, and revealed Captain Dick Newton — that is to say, Felix himself, who carried the lady off to safety, not without first making in his turn a long and defiant speech to the patient Aztecs. But they did not restrict themselves to speech-making; that was only the fine flower of their play. They ran, climbed trees, wrestled, and waded in the creek. They were happy and carefree children together. Gradually the books took a secondary place, and then were altogether neglected, even in the garret.

The garret had now come to be a dancing pavilion. . . . Rose had said, "Oh, it's easy — I'll show you!"— and she did. Rose whistled the tune — remarking that it was lucky her grand-dad was deaf — and taught him the waltz and the two-step; and with somewhat more difficulty, taught him to "lead." "I could dance when I was hardly out of the cradle," she said.

3

Finally the great night came. Felix had made an ingenious contrivance out of an iron barrel-hoop, for hanging the pail of coffee over the fire, and had filed some lengths of wire to serve as spits for broiling the meat. He secretly sliced and buttered two loaves of his mother's bread. Rose had brought a large piece of steak and some potatoes, and each of them had quantities of matches. A vast amount of firewood had been previously collected, and all was ready

for the great event. They met at the end of the lot, and whispering excitedly, made their way to the wood.

Everything went well. The bonfire blazed and roared, the coffee bubbled, and the bread and meat tasted as never did bread and meat before. It is true, the potatoes refused to roast, but who cared? It grew dark, and a few stars came out. They laughed and sang in the exhilaration of their escape. Rose put on his hat, rakishly, and he stuck behind his ear a flower which she had worn. A cool breeze came up, and they crept close together for warmth, and wrapped themselves in the heavy shawl she had brought. Hours had passed. It must be dreadfully late. They were silent, regretting that this must all presently come to an end.

"I don't want to go home," said Rose in a muffled tone, her head on his shoulder.

"I don't either," he whispered.

"Let's stay here all night," she said suddenly.

"Won't your grandfather be worried about you?"

"Worried?" She considered. "Not really worried. Angry, perhaps. He gets dreadfully angry over little things. . . ." Her voice changed to its play-acting tone, and she murmured against his ear the words he had heard from her lips on their first visit to these woods:

"Nothing but thunder! Merciful Heaven,
Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
Split'st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak
Than the soft myrtle: but man, proud man,
Dressed in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep."

She laughed. "Let him be angry!" she concluded.

"All right," said Felix, and drew her closer to him. They lay, silently, with wide-open eyes, staring up at the friendly stars. It seemed to Felix that this was the happiest hour of his life.

"This is wonderful," he whispered.

"Yes," she breathed. "Wonderful!"

They were too happy to go to sleep. Nevertheless, at last they slept, and awakened chill and stiff, a little before dawn. They laughed cheerfully, each secretly rather frightened at their daring. What might their folks be thinking had happened to them?

"I don't care," said Felix, half aloud.

"I don't care either," she said, and suddenly put her arms about him and kissed him, on the mouth, a queer little kiss that began fiercely and ended abruptly in a laugh.

"Let's just leave these things here, and get them tomorrow," she said. "We must hurry home."

"All right."

She took his arm, and they started. They stumbled over a root and fell, and picked themselves up, giggling.

"I like you, Felix," she whispered as they parted in front of the house.

4

Felix's mother had sat up waiting for him, and fallen asleep in the rocking-chair, her head drooping to one side comically, and her glasses hanging by one ear. Felix smiled grimly, and crept silently up the stairs and into bed. She would not know when he had come in, and he could make up some story to account for his lateness. . . .

Mrs. Fay proved to be easily managed. But perhaps old Mr. Henderson was more suspicious, for Rose did not come to the garret nor the wood next day. At night the old man prayed for an hour; and Rose, after repeating her short prayer in a defiant voice, did not bid her grandfather "Sweet dreams." The next day, too, there was no sign of her, and Felix had begun to wonder how he could find out what had happened, when, on the third day, the door of the garret opened, and Rose, half-dressed, with a shawl thrown around her, slipped in.

"I've only a moment," she said pantingly. "My grand-

father is keeping watch of me. I'm going to be sent away. It's because of my mother."

"I don't understand," he said. "What's happened?"

"I tell you," she said, "I'm going to be sent away — in the morning. I can't explain to you now. Can you come here tonight — after every one's in bed?"

"I guess so," he said.

"All right. I'll tell you then. Be sure and come. My grandfather hasn't found out about this place yet.— I must go back now." But she hesitated, looked at him questioningly, and then came swiftly and put her arms about him.

"Kiss me, Felix."

He kissed her, and she clung to him. "You can do a lot for me — if you really want to," she murmured. Then quickly she released herself and ran to the door. "Tonight," she said, and vanished.

5

Very much perturbed, Felix made his exit from the garret and from the house. Full of pity for the girl, who was apparently being so severely punished for her escapade, he planned dire revenges and impossible rescues, as he wandered about the streets. It would serve the old man right if they ran away together! He was intent upon this fantasy when, late in the afternoon, he ran into a school-fellow, the same Hubert who had once so tormented him, and whose tooth he had knocked out.

"Say," said Hubert, stopping him and confronting him with a peculiar grin, "what do you know about that Henderson girl?"

"What do you mean?" asked Felix bewilderedly.

"Why, you live in the old man's house, don't you?"

"Yes — what about it?"

"I'm asking *you*. I supposed you might have some idea who the guy is."

"The guy?"

"The man, you know. The man she's been carrying on with. The man everybody's looking for."

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

"You don't? Oh, well — I might have known! You, with your nose always stuck in a book! Of course you wouldn't know what was going on in the same house!"

"What is it? Tell me!"

Hubert told him, in words that were like a storm beating about his ears. . . . The girl had been carrying on a love-affair with some man, and her grandfather had found out about it, and come to Hubert's father, who was the district attorney. . . . Felix was staggered. It was not so much that he doubted the tale, as that it seemed to be another Rose Henderson, some girl that he did not know, who was being spoken of this way. . . .

"But they don't know who the man is — that's the trouble. And the girl won't tell. The way the old man got on to it was this. She stayed out all night, and wouldn't tell where she had been, so the next day the old man followed her, and found the place in the woods where the two of them had slept." . . . A dizzy light began to break upon Felix's mind. He tried to listen to what followed. ". . . found her hair-ribbon there . . . she wouldn't tell . . . going to send her away . . . think they were planning to elope. . . ."

The dizziness passed, and he heard the next sentence clearly. "The girl comes naturally enough by it, my father says. Her mother was just like that, you know."

Felix managed to ask: "Her mother — what do you mean?"

"Her mother — oh, she was an actress that the old man's son picked up somewhere. She ran away from her husband, and went back on the stage. He brought her back home, and she ran away again, with some man. Couldn't let the men alone. Then she got sick, and brought her kid back to the old man's place, and died there. The old man hated her, but he took the kid to raise. He never sent her

to school, because of the talk.— Oh, yes, they say the old man's son committed suicide on account of her. So you see she was a bad lot. And this girl Rose is another one just like her. The old man thought he was looking after her pretty sharp, but she fooled him!"

Felix did not hear any more except, as from a distance, the sneering phrase, "you with your nose stuck in a book!" . . . He stumbled away, sick with the helplessness of a child whose dream has been spoiled. He had lost his dream playmate, for he could no longer recognize her in the figure which was the centre of this coil of mortal passions; and he hated with a sick loathing the world which had taken her from him with its huge, ugly, unclean, destroying hand. He wanted to go away — away — anywhere — out of the reach of that horrible hand. . . .

And then, with a terrifying flash of realization, he saw that he could not go away. He must face reality in all its ugliness. He must tell Rose's grandfather the truth. For a moment after that idea came, the whole situation seemed clear and simple; when he had told the truth, none of these horrible uglinesses would exist — the world would be as it was before. But the next instant the idea froze him with fear. "No, I can't," he cried aloud. No, he could not wipe out the past, and the thoughts and suspicions in everybody's mind, with a few words; no, if he faced those things, it would be he who would be overwhelmed. "I can't," he cried, running blindly along the street. "No, no!" . . .

He thought he was running away; but he suddenly found himself on the Henderson porch, staring at the door. It was so ugly and so useless; he could not lift his hand to knock. But he thought for a moment of Rose, his dream-playmate, and reached up to lift the knocker. It fell, and the nightmare of reality became unutterably grotesque.

6

A harsh voice cried, "Come in!" and Felix entered, walking with unsteady knees across to where old Mr. Hen-

derson sat in a big rocking chair, with a great Bible on his lap. The old man stared up at him.

Felix tried to speak, but no sounds came from his dry throat. The old man made an impatient movement, and boomed, "Well?"

Then Felix heard himself saying,

"Where is she?"

"Who?" growled the old man.

"Rose!"

"She's locked in her room upstairs," said the old man. "And what business is that of yours?"

"Mr. Henderson," said Felix, "I — I was in the woods with her that night."

The old man stared, stooped, and lifted a heavy cane that lay beside his chair. He rose slowly, tremblingly, towering over the boy with upraised cane.

"What did you say?" he demanded.

"But," said Felix, "it isn't true —"

"What isn't true?" growled the old man, with cane wavering in the air.

"We made a bonfire and went to sleep beside it. That was all."

The cane lowered. "Come here. Why, you're just a child!" The old man sank down in his chair, and covered his face with his hands. "The child of a neighbour!" he groaned.

"But — I tell you —" began Felix.

"I'll believe you, child," said the old man softly.

There was a long silence, and then the old man turned upon him. "Do you pray?" he asked fiercely.

"Y-yes," said Felix.

"Then get down on your knees tonight and thank God that your soul has been saved alive out of hell-fire!" He began groaning again, and muttering, "To tempt a child! To tempt a child! Oh, God!"

"But —" said Felix.

"Tell me, my child. Tell me, and do not speak against

the truth. Did not that woman's daughter seek to allure you with idolatrous and heathenish arts?"

"No," said Felix, wondering what the old man meant.

He fixed Felix with his fierce eyes. "The arts of mummery and play-acting and — and dancing."

"Oh — that, yes. But —"

The old man rose. "Come over here," and he walked slowly over to a table, and took out from a drawer some objects which Felix recognized. They were a box of rouge, another of cold cream, a rabbit's-foot powder-puff, and a lipstick. Rose had brought them out to the wood with her once, and showed him how people "make-up" for the stage. They had been her mother's, she said. . . . She had brought them along on their bonfire night, too, but had not used them.

"Did you ever see those things before?"

"Y-yes," said Felix. "But —"

"Enough!" The old man regarded him gravely. "You are too young to understand. Thank God for that!" He pointed to the door. "Go," he said.

Felix had got to the door when the old man called him back. "Come here, my child," he said gently. Wondering, Felix came. "Kneel down here." Felix knelt, and the old man put a hand on his head. "You must not be sorry for her," he said. "She is a shameless harlot — like her mother. I had feared it,"— his head shook to and fro and tears began to run down his cheeks and his voice to choke with sobs —"I had feared it all these years — and prayed that it might not be — but by the Power of Hell — it was even so. She tempted you. A child. Oh, my God! —"

Felix stumbled to his feet and ran out of the room, while the old man sobbed and mumbled insanely on.

7

Felix wandered about the streets till nightfall. His mother saved his supper for him, but he could not eat. "You aren't well, Felix," she said anxiously. "I'm afraid

you are reading too much." He escaped to his room.

He was to meet Rose in the garret that night. He threw himself, without undressing, on the bed, and beat off strange, wild, foolish thoughts. . . .

What was she going to tell him tonight? Was she going to ask him to run away with her? And why should he not? . . . Yet she was no longer the dream-playmate with whom he had proposed in fancy to run away, only that afternoon. She had changed. He did not quite trust her. Indeed, he feared her. What had she been thinking of him? Had she thought him a fool, that he never kissed her? It was as if a voice whispered to him, "Hubert was right — you don't see anything, you with your nose always in a book!" . . . What would it be like if they ran away together? He braced himself to meet that adventure; and thus, overwrought and fearful, fell asleep. And as he lay there asleep a dream came to him. . . .

It seemed that he heard her step above, and that he climbed to meet her. He found her lying on the pillows, half-covered by her shawl only, and her cheeks and lips were bright red from the little boxes, and she held out her naked arms to him with a strange laugh. In his dream he said, "They told me you were wicked." And she smiled mysteriously, and said, "I don't care. I am my mother's daughter. Kiss me, Felix!"

He awoke.

Then, as he lay there, he heard her step sound lightly on the floor above. She crossed to the rug, and sat down, and waited. Felix rose, and then fell back trembling. He was afraid.

Was the dream real? Or was she only a lonely child like himself, waiting for her playmate, to bid him good-bye? He did not know. He only knew that he was afraid.

He buried his head in the pillow, and wept silently. The girl waited in the lonely darkness for a long time, and then he heard her firm proud step sound on the floor. She knew that he had failed her. She was going back to her room.

The door of the garret closed. Felix lay awake in shame and rage till morning.

Felix never saw her again, and never entered the garret or went to the wood where they had played. . . .

The Fays moved again, and school re-opened, and Felix read books, and forgot. And the next spring he heard, quite casually, that Rose Henderson had married a young farmer.

VIII The End of Maple

1

BOTH the boys were in Vickley now; first Jim had gone, then Ed. And then Mr. Fay lost his job again. It seemed useless for him to attempt to earn a living here in Maple. The boys had written, urging him to come to Vickley, and bring the rest of the family.

So it was decided to leave Maple.

Felix was glad. Not because it meant going to Vickley, but because it meant leaving the scene of innumerable pains and humiliations. He felt that in going he would leave behind him his childhood, with all its awkwardness and ignorance. . . .

2

They were living on the outskirts of Maple in one corner of a fine old house gone to ruin, that stood back in a great unkept lawn planted with fir trees. They shared the house with its owner, a fat and feeble old woman who smoked a pipe.

The rooms of the old house were almost stripped bare of furniture, the paper on the walls was ready to fall, the carpets were in rags. The rent which Felix's family paid was apparently the old woman's only income. She would potter slowly about the kitchen, groaning as she got herself a meal on her little gasoline stove, and then take herself slowly back to the great parlour, sink into her rocking chair, and take up her pipe. She liked to have Felix about the place, and sometimes she would ask him to write letters for her.

The letters were always to a daughter who lived in Chicago. She wanted her daughter to come home. The

old woman would dictate a sentence about her health, and then sit smoking and thinking a long time; then a sentence about the weather, and how it affected her joints, and another long period of smoking. Always she ended: "If I ever needed you, I need you now."

Once her nephew came to stay with her for a while. He was a cripple, and was sent from one to another among his relations. His name was Dick. He was twenty-one, and he could do nothing but whittle; there was something the matter with his back. "Get me that stick there," he would say to Felix as they sat together on the wide porch. Felix would bring him a piece of soft wood. Dick would bend his brown head over it, and his face, which was thin and strained, would become composed and beautiful as he worked. When he finished, it was a turtle or a mouse or a bird — delicate and sure in its carved contours. Then, after Felix had admired and handled it for a while, he would say, "Give it back!" And then he would destroy it. He would take his knife and chip off a bit here and there, his face lighted with an ugly, evil pleasure, as if he were tormenting a live thing. When at last it was only barely recognizable as the thing it had been, he would toss it carelessly out into the grass.

"Why do you do that?" Felix would ask curiously.

"I'm playing that I'm God," he would say, and laugh heartily, as though it were the greatest joke in the world.

"What do you mean?" Felix would persist. "I don't understand."

"You will some day," Dick would reply, and then he would whistle beautiful melodies.

Dick went away, and when Felix asked the old woman about him a month later, she told him Dick was dead.

3

Just before the family left Maple, a young man came to paper their corner of the house for the new tenants. Thirteen-year-old Felix hung about and watched him paste the

ugly rose-trellised strips of paper on the wall. The young man would stand beside his pasting-board between strips, light a cigarette, cross his legs, and talk. He was a thin, pimply-faced youth, and his voice was a squeaky, scurrying sound, like rats scampering across a garret-floor in the dark. Felix had told him they were going to Vickley.

"Yes," he said, in his ratty voice, "you'll go to Vickley. *I* went to St. Looey. Never been to a city before, I hadn't. Never been to a dance till I was seventeen. Never had a girl wink at me. Yes, *I* went. First thing I did was to explore the Mysteries of the Great City. So will you. And let me tell you, those are *some* mysteries!" He winked engagingly, and prepared to expatiate upon them.

But Felix suddenly remembered something he had intended to do before he left this house. Leaving the paper-hanger, he burst in upon the old woman who was quietly smoking her pipe in the big arm-chair in her parlour.

"You told me sometime I could look upstairs for books," he said shyly.

She nodded, as though she did not realize what an important occasion this was. He had more than once asked boldly for permission to look, but she had always vaguely put him off. Now the time had come when, if ever, it must be done: they were taking the train at three o'clock. He had been very much afraid she might still refuse. Upon her nod, he dashed upstairs.

Two great bare rooms, with not a sign of a book. Two empty closets. Felix opened the third with desperation. There must be books hidden away somewhere! Sure enough, on the top shelf, a pile of illustrated weeklies, and a great thick book bound in red cloth. Felix pulled it down and examined it.

"Hill's Manual," it was called, but that was not the whole title. It was further, "A Compendium of Useful Knowledge; A Complete Reference Work; Containing —" Oh, it contained everything — it told how to build a house and how to write a love-letter; how to make a public speech, and how

to resuscitate a drowning person; how to keep caterpillars away from fruit-trees and how to write poetry — with illustrations, examples, and complete explanations. It was, as the title page modestly said, "A Library in One Book."

Felix sat on the floor with it a long time, desiring it, and wondering if the old woman would part with it. At length, unable to endure the suspense, he hurried downstairs, showed it to her, and asked fearfully, "Can I have it?"

The old woman glanced at it and nodded again. Felix went out before she could change her mind, and sat down on the doorstep, turning the pages and gloating over it.

The paper-hanging youth paused in his labours and lit a cigarette unnoticed. He was accustomed to have his elucidations of the mysteries of hectic metropolitan life attended to with the utmost eagerness and respect by the adolescent minds with which he came in contact in the course of his labours in the town. He cleared his throat promisingly, but Felix did not look up. Here in the back of the book was a description of the different kinds of metre, a mystery which Felix, in his occasional attempts at rhyme, had pondered to himself. Here it was all explained — iambics, trochees, dactyls, spondees, anapests. . . .

"As I say," resumed the paper-hanging youth, "you don't know anything at all about life. And you've got to learn, sooner or later."

But Felix, sitting in the doorway, absorbed in the mysteries of iambic pentameter, did not hear.

Book Two

Vickley

IX A Family

I

VICKLEY was a city of thirty thousand inhabitants, undistinguished except for the fact that it was the largest town in a radius of five counties. It was the stepmother city of the surrounding region, unlovely and unloved. Ambitious boys dreamed of Chicago, which blazed and roared to the northeast; but they came to Vickley.

Jim had come; he too had dreamed of Chicago, and made one brief, reckless and defeated invasion of it; then he had returned to be one of the sullen stepchildren of Vickley. Once again he had tried to escape; he belonged to the militia, and when the Spanish War broke out he had joined the army to go to Cuba. The regiment had gone to a fever-ridden camp in Florida, whence he was sent home to Maple twisted and bent with rheumatism. But he could not stay; hating Vickley, he had returned to it and to running a machine which took off, piece by piece, parts of five fingers and thumbs.

The boys, after Ed came, lived in one room in a boarding house. Ed had a job in the wagon works, painting wheels a monotonous carmine; on Sundays he sat trying to draw. One of his drawings, a picture of a dying hawk falling through the air, hung on the wall; he had done it when he first came, a memory of his boyhood in Maple. He had done nothing since then but copy things, with a tired eye and a stiff hand, out of the art supplement of the Sunday paper. Every night before he went to bed he straightened that picture of the hawk; the girl who cleaned up the room invariably knocked it askew with her duster, and every

night he regarded its crookedness with a jealous eye. One day he took it down and gave it to a girl, and thereafter spent his Sundays away from the room and drew no more.

Then Mr. Fay and the rest of the family came, to start life anew in Vickley.

2

The new home of the Fays was one half of a little double-house in Mulberry Street on the edge of a cheap residence district, flanked by a gully and a ragged bluff, and beyond that the Mississippi. A tiny little house, it held with difficulty the household goods accumulated by the Fays in half a lifetime — old wooden bedsteads, moth-eaten couches, battered bureaus, rickety chairs with cane seats repaired with heavy twine, ancient stoves, an extension table with many "leaves," the family portraits "enlarged" in crayon, a trunkful of books including the Bible, a Family Dispensary and all the school books ever used by the younger Fays, and a vast quantity of rags, which Mrs. Fay intended to make into a rag carpet.

And finally there was the what-not, symbol of the artistic aspirations of the Fay family — a series of little triangular shelves tied together with string and made to hang in a corner of the parlour; its front decorated with stiff brown paper folded so that it resembled the scales of an ichthyosaurus, and painted over with shiny black; loaded with family photographs, coloured fans, ornamental cups and saucers, china shepherdesses, curiously shaped flasks which had once contained perfume and were still preserved as objects of art; all manner of pathetic trinkets accumulated by Mrs. Fay for parlour decoration in the odd moments of a lifetime spent in the kitchen. At first respected and admired by all, it had been neglected for years, with none but Mrs. Fay to do it reverence. Gradually it had become a sort of filing cabinet for grocery bills, rent receipts, letters from relatives, and old copies of the Maple *Adage*. Its chief function was to gather and preserve the dust of years.

With these accustomed articles disposed about the five little rooms, the Mulberry Street house took on the semblance of all the homes ever inhabited by the Fays.

All was as before, and yet all was different. In Maple it had been possible to pretend that the family poverty was only a temporary accident. There were memories of prosperity; and rich or poor, the family was a part of the town life. Mr. Fay had served on Fourth of July celebration committees, and helped get up the Republican rallies. Jim had been drum-major of the Junior Republican band. Everybody had been interested in Ed, the house-painter who wanted to be an artist. Old friends of Mrs. Fay still came from the ends of town to help her make a quilt, as in the old days of "quilting-bees." But in Vickley they were lost. Nobody knew them or cared about them. The boys were so much labour to be used up ruthlessly in shops and factories. Ed, who unconsciously put something of an artist spirit into the painting of wagon wheels, was outdistanced in the speeded work of the Vickley factory: "a good workman, but slow"—and his wages showed it. Jim was only holding his job on sheer nerve and desperation. And Mr. Fay was a mere useless old man. He dyed his moustache and demanded a job, but nobody was fooled.

The fact that he could not get work as a butcher never ceased to puzzle Mr. Fay, for he knew himself to be a better butcher than any of the young snips that he saw behind the marble counters in Vickley. He did once get a job as a bartender, but he had to hold it, as it were by stealth, for the fraternal insurance society to which he belonged virtuously forbade such employment, and he dared not lose the insurance on which he had paid premiums so long. That danger was ended by a dispute with the bartender. Thus he was reduced for the most part to washing the dishes at home—an ironic destiny.

Mr. Fay still had something of jauntiness in his manner, and he carried his small plump body with the vestiges of a military pride. If the remembered glories of his youth

could not keep his limbs vigorous, they kept his tongue sharp and his eyes bright. His cheeks were jolly and his jaw was stubborn. He seemed with the years to grow more militant in his economic adventures — more ready to resent and revenge the slights and insults of his employers. These adventures were always unprofitable, except as material for dinner-table reminiscence.

The prize story was the one about how he lost his job at the glucose works. He had managed to get work there nailing up boxes packed with cans of corn-syrup. He had held it a week and a half when the superintendent happened to stroll through the packing room. The superintendent was young and English: manifestly a fool. This superintendent had stopped to watch Mr. Fay nail up a box, and then had said: "You'll have to work faster than that, my man!" Mr. Fay, in telling the story, reproduced the broad English *a* in "faster," and emphasized the preposterous phrase, "my man": and any one who heard it understood why we had fought two wars with England. Of course Mr. Fay had ignored him and gone on working. And then the young fool had actually kicked him! — or at least touched Mr. Fay's kneeling body with the toe of his shoe. "Do you heah me?" he had asked.

Adam Fay, who had in his time defied successfully the whole military power of the United States Government, rose. In front of him was a container marked in large letters "Sulphuric Acid." Mr. Fay stooped, ladled out a dipperful of the liquid, and turned to the superintendent.

"Do you know what this is?" demanded Adam Fay fiercely.

"Why, sulphuric acid!" said the superintendent, looking frightened.

"Then get down on your knees, you dog," said Adam Fay, "or I'll throw this right in your damned insolent face. And be quick about it!"

"And," Mr. Fay would say at the supper table, telling the story, "he got down on his knees, I tell you, quick

enough. And then . . . everybody in the room, you see, was looking, and didn't know what to make of it . . . and then I put the dipper up to my mouth and drank it down. It was nothing but drinking water. And damn if that Englishman didn't just fall over backwards and crawl out on his hands and knees."

3

To these stories Jim would listen delightedly. "You're a winner, dad!" he would say, laughing; and then with a sudden harshness his face would reflect the pains that afflicted his poor legs, still aching from the walk home.

It was tragic to see Jim hobble to and from the factory, but he would not give up. When he had first come home from Florida, bent and twisted, he had sat about the house for a month, reading Frank Merriwell weeklies and cursing angrily at Felix if the boy bumped against his chair; and then one day he hobbled down to the railway station to go back to Vickley — to work. "Jim wants some new neckties!" Mr. Fay had explained. Was it the pride of good clothes that kept Jim at work now, in spite of the devil that gnawed at his leg-bones? Mr. Fay had said when Jim enlisted in the militia, that it was for the neat uniform. The "little gentleman," who had quit school rather than wear patches: who had been so proud of his uniform as drum-major of the Junior Republican band in Maple; who had cursed and bribed and almost wept, trying to cure little Felix of his slovenliness:— was it the aspiration toward elegance which had led him to that fever-camp in Florida from which he had returned a cripple?

That aspiration still ruled his life. After dinner, on Wednesday and Saturday evenings, he would dress and go down town. The whole family had to assist. During the process, the frantic bad temper of the chronic invalid would break out unrestrained. "God damn it, *give* me that towel!" he would shout, having rubbed soap in his eyes. His mother would stand at the ironing board, pressing the

crease in his best trousers to a new salience while he shaved fretfully. Felix polished his elegant low shoes — clumsily, Jim assured him. Mr. Fay, with jocular comments, shaved the back of Jim's neck.

But at last, when he had adjusted his pearl stickpin in his blue silk necktie, and looked in the glass to see that his hair was parted to a nicety over his handsome forehead,— then his suavity returned. Clothed like a gentleman, he was the soul of courtesy. He would sit for a while in the parlour, conversing with the family with an easy gaiety. Then he would ask for his hat and stick, with such an air that even Felix was glad to get them for him. And thus, shaven and combed and powdered, with waxed moustache, brilliant-surfaced shoes, and trousers creased to a hairline, a figure to admire, he would leave the house. So debonair was he that no one would have guessed how painfully he had limped home. He strolled down to hear the band play, leaning lightly on his cherry-wood cane.

4

After dinner, when Mr. Fay had sat down to read the newspaper, Felix would start out of the house. His mother would come running to the door and ask, "Where are you going, Felix?"

"To the library!" he would reply impatiently, hurrying off. . . .

Mrs. Fay would go back to the dishpan.

She did the housework of the family, with some dilletante assistance from her husband; and in addition she raised chickens in the backyard and sold them (with great reluctance, for she loved them) to buy school-books for Felix.

Bearing the brunt of that losing struggle with poverty, she was losing visibly all that remained to her of strength and health, but not all her spirit. In her bent form an intense weariness seemed to struggle with a pathetic eagerness to serve. At the table, she sat nearest the kitchen door,

on the very edge of a tilted chair, so that she could rise and wait on the family if they wanted anything. Five years younger than her husband, she seemed an old, old woman, worn out, used up in household drudgeries. She had not even the dignity of age, for a pair of crooked brass-rimmed spectacles which she habitually wore (saving her gold ones for grand occasions which never came), gave her thin face a sadly comic aspect. But her eyes were still young; through those crooked spectacles she looked out upon a world darkened by the smoke of factories and haunted by hopeless debts, with the same shy, eager, trusting gaze as once, long since, in her girlhood, when the skies had been radiant with infinite promise; and still at heart the same foolish girl, she still with the same unbounded trust held out her hands to life.

X Felix: Dictator

I

FELIX, who had come to Vickley with the great red book under his arm which told how to do everything, was at first lost in the alien world of new faces and strange duties. They had singing lessons in Jefferson School, and Felix, not knowing how to sing, had to open his mouth and pretend — a proceeding toward which the singing teacher occasionally cocked a suspicious ear. There was also a manual training department, in which Felix astonished his teacher by an ability to draw up with compass and T-square the most difficult "plans," and by an utter incapacity to make the simplest object with saw and plane. Aside from such things, Felix mixed unnoticed with the flood of pupils at Jefferson School, until early in the second year an incident happened which brought him, in a very curious way, to the front.

The boys of the twelfth grade wanted to get up a baseball team to play against the boys from other schools. The girls, hearing of this, decided that they ought to have a basketball team. The girls spoke to the teacher, and the teacher spoke to the Principal, and the result was that a meeting of the twelfth grade was called one afternoon. The Principal was present, and constituted himself the chairman. He was a plump little man with an air of fraternization toward the older pupils which deceived himself. He had no idea how this formal meeting embarrassed them.

But it did not embarrass Felix. For the first time since he had first come to Jefferson School, he felt at home. He knew all about meetings. He had read Hill's Manual on

the subject. So when no one responded to the Principal's invitation to get up and speak, he rose unabashed and talked for five minutes. He spoke of the desirability of forming a permanent organization, to express the spirit of Jefferson School, to enable them to get better acquainted with each other, and to develop their physical and mental "potentialities." The roomful of boys and girls listened in awed silence. They were not aware that Jefferson School had a spirit to express, they all, except Felix, knew each other quite well, they had developed painfully and unwillingly all the potentialities they thought they could stand. They only wanted to play baseball and basketball. Nevertheless, after their first shock of seeing some one do something that wasn't done, namely, get up and make a speech, they felt constrained to admire and applaud his nerve. The Principal listened with real enthusiasm, and took Felix at his word as the spokesman of the meeting. And when Felix duly finished by moving that a committee be appointed by the chair to draft the Constitution and By-laws of the society, he made Felix chairman of the committee.

The committee met the next afternoon after school in the principal's office. The other members of the committee were Red Schaefer and Stella Lewis, two boisterous young persons of whom Felix had been rather afraid. But with the business in hand he forgot his shyness, and seated himself at the Principal's desk before a pile of papers.

"We have met," he said, "to write a Constitution."

Red looked glum and Stella a little frightened. "How do you write a Constitution?" asked Red.

"Like this," said Felix, and set pen to paper.

Felix knew all about Constitutions; and when half an hour later the Principal dropped in to see how they were getting along, the charter of the Jefferson School Literary and Athletic Society was almost completed.

At another meeting a few days later, Felix read the Constitution, which was unanimously adopted, and under its provisions they proceeded to the election of officers. Felix

was elected president, Stella secretary and Red treasurer by acclamation.

Felix was for the moment surprised and confused by the honour thus bestowed upon him. But he was confused for a moment only. Instantly his egotism rallied, and he promptly took charge of the society and its destinies.

2

With some help from the Principal — for he had difficulty in remembering the names of his fellow members — he picked his committees, and laid out their work. The first thing he planned was a literary program. Red and Stella were to be the principals in a debate, "Resolved, That Jefferson was a greater president than Washington," and he was to read an essay on "Jefferson's Influence on the Early History of Our Country." The program was a great success, and he arranged another — and another.

The robustious boys and girls of Jefferson School, who had wanted to play baseball and basketball, spent the rest of the year, somewhat to their surprise, writing essays and participating in debates. They did not know why this was so. They only knew that so it was. The reason was that Felix had forgotten all about baseball and basketball.

Felix was happy. The school, which had seemed to him at first so much like a prison, with its radiator bars running around all sides of the room, and its tiny cinder-strewn yard at the back shut in with a high board fence, suddenly became his home. He hurried there eagerly in the morning and left late and reluctant in the afternoon. Elated by his sense of power, he swaggered about, talked inordinately, patronized his teachers and chummed familiarly with the friendly Principal. The blackboarded room in which he sat was glorified in his eyes by the uses to which it was put every Thursday afternoon when he mounted the platform, took the President's chair and looked out over an assembly met to do the things he thought interesting to do.

3

After Christmas there was a new election. Felix, perhaps fortunately, declined a re-nomination, and Red succeeded him to the presidency. But Felix did accept the position of librarian to a non-existent library, and thenceforth, somewhat to its surprise, the whole energies of the Club were bent to making that library come into being. Felix would be satisfied with nothing less than a hundred well-selected books. He brought his own, and he made everybody else bring theirs; and when this still left something to be desired, he arranged a performance of "Julius Cæsar," to be attended by the other pupils at ten cents a head, to start a library fund. The play was accordingly given, Felix taking the part of Mark Antony. Red was Cæsar, and Stella refused the part of Cæsar's wife (which was then cut from the play), and insisted on being one of the male conspirators. The play had a run of three performances, and brought in twenty-eight dollars.

A meeting was held at which the question of how to use this sum was brought up. The second and third performance had been an afterthought, but Felix assumed that the whole sum would go to the library. He was no more than slightly annoyed when a boy who had never before raised his voice in the meetings of the Jefferson School Literary and Athletic Society, rose at the far corner of the room and with a flushed face and awkward tongue stammeringly proposed that the extra eighteen dollars be spent for baseball paraphernalia. Felix was rather irritated when there seemed to be some support of this outrageous notion. So he rose to quell the revolt. Still flushed with his Roman triumphs, he stood up like Antony beside the bier of Cæsar, and unleashed his words. He had won every debate he had taken part in, and he fancied himself as a speaker. He could see interest kindle in the eyes of the Principal as he spoke of how great a boon the library would be to the pupils who followed them in the Jefferson School. He spoke of

the permanence of literature as compared to all other things. He said that if Jefferson were alive to know the action of the society which was named after him, he would be glad that they were doing their part to keep alive the flame of thought in the nation that he had helped to establish. In fact, he, Felix, had been intending to suggest that the whole sum be devoted to the purchase of a set of Jefferson's writings: and this, he knew, the Jefferson School Literary and Athletic Society would be proud to do.

Perhaps it was that word "Athletic"— which Felix uttered as a mere matter of form in pronouncing the name of the society, but which stuck out to his hearers' ears in ironic contrast to the offensive erudition of his discourse. Or perhaps it was that the dumb resentment of a body of human beings coerced against their wishes too long had found a voice in the stammering proposal of the boy in the corner. But there was no applause when Felix finished his speech. He did not notice that, and waited confidently. No one else spoke. Red put the question. Felix's voice alone replied "Aye." When the Noes were called for, a thundering storm replied.

Felix sat dazed . . . and when the meeting was over, stumbled out of the building, infinitely bewildered and hurt. He did not want to go home. He went instead across the gulley behind the house to the bluff, and lay there on the grass, watching the sunset and trying to forget.

The Jefferson School Literary and Athletic Society soon disbanded. By the end of the term, Felix had recovered sufficiently to find it only natural that he should figure as the chief ornament of Jefferson School in the graduation exercises. He decided to deliver an oration on "The Influence of Ideas on Civilization."

XI A Critique of Pure Reason

I

THE whole family came to hear Felix deliver his oration. In honour of the occasion he had a new suit, with long trousers. Jim, fretfully anxious that Felix should not appear in public in his usual slovenly aspect, superintended his toilet for the occasion. The celluloid collar which Felix ordinarily wore because it could be cleaned with one rub of a damp cloth, was discarded for a high linen one, and Jim lent him a fancy stickpin for his necktie. The Principal had stayed after school to coach him in the manner of his delivery; but when the time came Felix forgot the lessons, and standing stiff and motionless, a thin pale figure in a high collar and a stiff blue suit, he uttered his oration toward the vaulted roof. His voice was changing; when he raised it too high, it broke, fluttering up into heights of piercing shrillness, and only finding its way back after erratic explorations into a profound bass. The Principal, sitting nervously in his place on the platform, flushed and bit his lip when these accidents occurred. But Felix was unconscious of them; unconscious of his audience, save that it was there to listen. Rapidly, in a strained voice that shifted unexpectedly from key to key, lost to the world, forgetful of everything save what he was saying, he delivered his oration. He *believed* in the influence of ideas upon civilization.

At home, afterward, his brother Ed kissed him with affectionate pride, and gave him a five dollar gold piece, telling him that he would be a great credit to his family. Ed was going to leave in a few days for Port Royal, a big town up the river, where he had a better job; he hoped to make

enough money to help the family out of their difficulties, and — if both things could be done — marry Alice, the good-looking Irish girl he had been going with in Vickley.

Felix, after due consideration, spent the five dollars for an unabridged dictionary of the English language.

His mother clipped the oration from the Vickley *Union*, where it was printed along with Felix's photograph, and laid it away among her treasures.

2

Felix got a job that summer delivering groceries, and held it with great difficulty for six weeks. He could not learn how to hitch up the horse properly, nor remember where the streets were. Another job in the shipping department of a wholesale house was interrupted by the opening of school. It had become a family tradition that Felix should have his education, and though Felix's small wage was needed by the family it was taken as a matter of course that he should go back to school.

Unconscious of any responsibility attaching to him in the way of making the most of his educational opportunities, Felix devoted most of the time during his first six months at high school to writing stories for the school monthly. The stories were modelled upon those of Edgar Allan Poe, and had nothing to do with the world he lived in, of which he became increasingly oblivious.

Every evening, unconscious of streets or people or the evening sky, he would hurry to the little grey stone building on the corner facing the square. He was one of the three persons in town who were permitted, against the rules, to go direct to the shelves. The other two he frequently saw prowling like himself in the narrow aisles between the high-piled tiers of books. One was a robust clergyman who rode a bicycle and wore knickerbockers. He sometimes tried to engage Felix in conversation, but without success. The other was the secretary of a woman's club, a deep-bosomed, maternal woman who annoyed Felix by " trying to help him

find what he wanted." Felix wanted only to be let alone. He would go here and there among the shelves, dipping into this book and that, standing on one foot and then on the other, tasting a score of volumes and finally at the closing hour carrying off the most precious of them. In the library he was a free citizen of a great world.

3

Adolescence, that mysterious re-birth of the soul, takes many forms. To Felix it was a period of intense happiness, of amazing and delightful discoveries. Going about blind to the actual world, he turned his gaze inward upon a world of ideas and dreams. He lived, so far as he could be said to live, among the books at the public library, and bent over a writing table with a pen in his hand in a corner of the living room at home. In the books he found endless, unrolling vistas of new and fascinating ideas; and his writings were the half-unconscious record of his fantastic dreams. He read books of anthropology and ethnology as a child reads fairy tales. He knew why savages believed that stones are alive and that trees can speak, why they had totems and consulted medicine men, and what was their conception of the world of the dead. He knew about neolithic arrows and brachycephalic skulls. He knew what kind of visions a certain tribe of Southwestern American Indians had when they ate ceremonially a certain poisonous berry, and why another tribe in Asia worshipped a perpendicular stone. He pored over Egyptian hieroglyphics and Aztec picture-writings, wandered among the skulls, flints and broken pottery in the Vickley Academy of Sciences, and read some dozens of huge volumes containing translations of the Sacred Books of the East.

Toward the end of his first year in high school Felix came across a book which furnished a grand generalization uniting all that he had been learning into one magnificent theory. It was a book written to prove that all civilization had originated in a continent in the Atlantic Ocean, from which

colonists had spread all over the world. This continent had been submerged in some tremendous cataclysm, of which the universal legends of the Flood were dim memories. Plato had heard of such a continent from the Egyptian priests — "an island beyond Gades." An examination of the bed of the Atlantic showed that such a continent had once existed. If this were true, it explained why the same myths, customs, implements and architecture were found all over the earth, and why so many words in unrelated languages were identical. For confirmation, the author quoted a hundred different savants, explorers, historians.

One day at school, in the class in ancient history, Felix mentioned the lost continent of Atlantis. The teacher asked him what he meant, and Felix occupied the rest of the period telling about it. The teacher was dubious; it sounded untrue; but she had been busy teaching since she left college, and in that time many new discoveries had been made; perhaps — She wished to tell him it was a fraud, but did not venture to, and Felix carried off the occasion with his illusory facts and his very real fervour.

That afternoon, after school, Felix looked up one of these alleged facts in the book from which it had been quoted. It was one at which he had noticed the teacher's dubious smile. Sure enough here was the foremost geologist of the age saying: "There was certainly once a continent where now is the bed of the Atlantic"— but the sentence did not end there; it went on —"a continent which sank a few million years before the appearance of life on the globe."

Felix was dismayed. Was his grand theory, then, only a lie? He looked up other quotations and references. It was the same with them all. They were garbled, wrenched from their contexts, made to misrepresent the facts they dealt with. Or else they were not quoted from scientific books at all, but from other imaginative works about the Lost Atlantis.

Felix suffered in giving up his theory. It was so beautiful that it ought to be true. He was ashamed of the spectacle

he had made of himself in the class-room, retailing stale nonsense. He was glad nobody had known the truth.

The incident planted in his mind a tiny seed of suspicion toward his world of ideas. He could be deceived and humiliated there where he thought himself safe, as well as anywhere else.

But the seed of suspicion had fallen upon stony soil, and it put forth no roots. His bent was to believe in new ideas. How could one not succumb to the fascination of theories — such theories as those which explained the process, magnificent and accidental, by which the moneron became the ape, the ape a tool-using, fire-building savage, and the savage at last world-conquering Man! Or that other theory, of which his books furnished him vague hints, that in a final battle against kings and capitalists and priests, mankind should become free. His vision reached confidently back into the darkness of the past and forward into the mists of the future.

In an argument with his father one day it came out that he did not believe in the Republican party. Mr. Fay was incredulous, angry, hurt.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, rising uncertainly to confront this catastrophe, "that you're going to be a Democrat?"

"No," said Felix. "The Democrats are just as bad as the Republicans. Politics is all rot anyway."

This was insanity. But even insanity wasn't quite as bad as having a son of his turn out a Democrat.

Mr. Fay's instinct was to blame it on his wife. "This," he said, turning to her with a sarcastic smile, "is the education you've been giving him." And he walked out of the room.

Felix turned to walk out of the other door. His mother's voice halted him a moment.

"Felix," she asked in a troubled voice, "don't you believe in God, either?"

"No. Why?" said Felix absently, and went out.

She did not believe he had understood her question. But she did not dare to ask him again.

Felix went out to the bluff, and while the sun sank in golden clouds he lay and dreamed of a golden age to come. As he dreamed, the irritation of the incident at home dwindled and vanished. He was happy, full of a sense of power.

A phrase from a magazine article he had been reading repeated itself over and over in his mind like a strain of music: "when the beings that are yet within the loins of man shall stand erect upon the earth, and stretch out their hands among the stars." Then it faded, and a single word shone in his mind like a fragment of that vanished sun which had just dropped below the horizon: "Superman!"

XII Two Against the World

I

IT was toward the end of his second year in high school, when Felix was sixteen years old, that he found a friend. He had had companions of a sort in Vickley; but he had not been conscious of any bond between himself and them, and when they drifted away he was scarcely aware of the loss. There was no one to whom he could speak freely, no one who could share his thoughts, until Stephen Frazer blazed into his life.

Stephen was a tall, ungainly, quiet youth, a year older than Felix, and in his third year at high school. He and Felix barely knew each other by sight, and neither of them had taken any notice of the other, until one evening at the library, when, standing in line at the wicket, they found that they were carrying respectively the first and the second volume of Haeckel's "History of Creation." In the shy and rather cautious conversation that followed, they discovered that the carrying of these twin volumes was no accident, but that they were, indeed, kindred souls. When the library assistant came up, they became silent, as if they had been caught in an exchange of guilty secrets. They went out together flushed and excited.

"Let's go some place where we can talk," said Stephen.

"Good," said Felix.

"How about Bailey's? We'll have a Welsh rabbit and talk while we eat."

Bailey's was the one good restaurant that the town boasted. It was outside Felix's world, and he demurred. "I haven't enough money," he said.

"I've got plenty," said Stephen. "But you're right—

Bailey's is too damned respectable. We'll go to Joe's." And he led the way to a dingy lunch-room filled with tobacco-smoke. He addressed the proprietor familiarly as they took their seats at a little bare-topped table, and ordered coffee and hamburger sandwiches with big slices of onion.

"And now," he said, turning earnestly to Felix, "how far do you go? All the way?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Felix.

"I mean, are you an Atheist? I am!" He said it defiantly.

"Oh, that — of course," said Felix.

"Then shake!" said Stephen, holding out his hand.

Felix was a little bewildered by having so much importance attached to that fact, but he felt in this meeting something which was new in his life, the beginning of an unexpected and delightful comradeship in the adventure of thought, and he was too grateful to quibble at the terms of his admission to it.

"How long have you been an Atheist?" was Stephen's next question.

"Oh, since last winter," said Felix.

Stephen still waited, and Felix suddenly realized that he was expected to relate the whole story. "It began with my joining the church," he said. "There was a boy at school that I was chumming with — Walter Edwards, you know him — and he wanted me to go to Sunday school with him at the First Baptist Church down here. I went, and it was rather interesting, so I kept on going. Then the whole class was going to join the church, and they wanted me to join, too. I didn't see any reason why I shouldn't — so I did. And I was baptized, and caught cold, and had to stay at home a month. And the minister came to see me, and left a book for me to read. It was a volume of sermons refuting the higher criticism. I had never heard of the higher criticism before, but the more I read the more it appealed to me. I read the book three times — and made notes on

the margins of the pages as I read. The third time finished me. I was what the book called an infidel. . . . And that's all," he finished.

"And that was all?" echoed Stephen. "You mean to say you did it all by yourself?"

"Well," said Felix, "I went on with my other reading — anthropology and all that — and I noticed that nobody else seemed to believe in the Bible either. I suppose as a matter of fact I'd never believed in it myself. How could any one believe in that stuff, once he stopped to think about it?"

"And it came as easy to you as all that? God!" cried Stephen. "I mean"— he checked himself apologetically —"well, you do get the habit of saying things like that, and you can't drop it even when you find out they don't mean anything. I was going to say I had a devil of a time getting rid of those old notions myself. I suffered torment. I went through hell." He paused, as though discouraged by his inability to describe his emotions without invoking the figments of the theology which he had discarded. "It wasn't so easy for me," he concluded. "It took me a year and I don't know how many of Robert G. Ingersoll's books before I really knew where I was at.— You've read Ingersoll, of course?"

"No," said Felix. "He was mentioned in the book, but I never knew who he was."

"You never read Ingersoll!" Stephen was silent, in startled apprehension of the fact that one could go through such a crisis without help from Ingersoll.

"Well," he said, "you'll like him. I'll lend his books to you. I've got them all. I saved out of my allowance and bought them."

"Allowance." . . . The word had a curious sound to Felix. He had never encountered it save in books. He looked at Stephen, and noted his clothes. They were markedly different from his own. Felix was not a good observer, and did not know in what the difference lay —

a silk shirt was the only obvious clue — but they had an aristocratic air. The difference consisted mainly in the fact that they were bought for summer comfort and that they fitted. Felix's own wrists protruded from his sleeves, his trousers were frayed at the heels; and though Stephen wore his clothes as carelessly as Felix, he could not possibly make them look so unkempt. And Stephen's speech was like his clothes; there was a roughness and carelessness about his use of it which did not conceal a certain aristocratic enunciation of the vowels.

But these class-differences, vaguely apprehended, were utterly forgotten when Frazer began to talk of Ingersoll. "Oh, you must read him! He's one of the great thinkers of the world!" And with passionate, stumbling eloquence he began to describe the vision of a free humanity which Ingersoll had given him. "Not afraid! — not chattering with fear in the dark! — not beating their breasts before idols called God! — not worrying about being good, but just being happy and free and fearless . . . having a real heaven here on earth. . . .

"Felix! I'm damn' glad I found you. . . . It makes me feel as if we might see a little of that ourselves before we die. The beginning of it, anyway."

"Yes," said Felix in a glow, "if we do our share to bring it about."

"Yes," said Frazer. "That's it. What can we do? . . . Joe! Two hamburger sandwiches and coffee! . . ."

2

The comradeship in thought that thus began, flowered in long midnight walks and talks, in which the world was torn down and rebuilt anew to their mutual satisfaction, in the name of Atheism.

Stephen was an orphan with a heritage of resentment against the religion of his rigorous Methodist parents. They had not let him play on Sunday, they had horrified his

young imagination with accounts of the torments of hell, and they put the ban of their sternest prohibition upon card-playing, dancing, and the theatre. They had roused him to a rebellion which, because of his temperament, had taken even in boyhood an intellectual turn. And now that they were dead, and he was being brought up by an uncle who though a pillar of the church was a much more easy-going person, he was still fighting it out with the tyranny that had cramped his childhood. It was natural enough that his adolescent idealism should take the form of Atheism.

But Felix had never had any religious training. He had intermittently gone to Sunday School in Maple, but its mild teachings had not particularly engaged his attention. Sunday was to him only a day of clean clothes and day-long, uninterrupted reading. Religion had hardly ever been mentioned in his home. As to forbidden pleasures, Felix had been freely and laughingly offered a taste — which he did not like — out of the bottle in the cupboard from which his father took a morning and evening nip, cocking a jolly eye at the yellow liquor before he tossed it off; Felix had learned, at the tender age of eight, to play poker — though not with any skill or enjoyment; and nobody except "crazy old Henderson" had ever suggested that dancing was wicked. The Bible was to him an interesting old book, which he had read without considering whether he had to "believe" it or not. He had, strictly speaking, no just grudge against God.

Stephen had got into the habit of identifying the tyranny of man, of which he took increasing note, with the tyranny of the God of his childhood. He knew that his pious uncle was a stockholder in a box-factory in which girls were wretchedly overworked and underpaid. He knew that his cousin Fanny loathed her husband, and fled from him twice a year to her mother's roof, until she was nagged and coaxed into going back to him. He knew that his cousin Will, who had a secret passion for writing poetry, was fretting miserably at a desk in his father's law-office. His rebellion

against God was a rebellion against the order of the world in which these things had to be.

Felix was less a rebel than a Utopian. Since that time in his childhood when he had broken all the laws he knew in letting his sister out of the garret, he had not consciously contravened authority — he had only transcended it in dreams of perfection. He had forgotten his runaway sister. Nor did he see in the frustrated ambitions of his brother Ed a parallel to the tragedy of the lawyer-poet of whom Stephen told. He had come to ignore the world about him and live in a realm of his imagining. He had at first looked back to a Golden Age in the past. He had subscribed devoutly to the theory of Atlantis, and given it up with pain. He had believed enthusiastically in the Aztec civilization described in Prescott's fairy-tale history, and mourned sincerely when his ethnological investigations reduced its glories to the rude achievements of a barbaric tribe. He had turned for a time to the more authentic splendours of Ancient Greece for solace; but there was an ending of them in the squalor and misery of the Peloponnesian war — and he could not satisfy his craving for perfection with the contemplation of a ruin. He had been forced to look forward into the future.

Yet in companionship with Stephen an instinctive hatred of the world as it is awoke in him to match Stephen's passion, obliterating with lurid crimson the crystalline perfection of his own dreams. Together they cursed the institutions, the traditions, the restrictions, the cruelty and the waste of Christian civilization.

3

Felix went to the library as usual. But it had become for him a different place. It was no longer a great world in which he wandered alone and free; it had shrunk to a rendezvous.

He still prowled among the tall bookstacks; but rest-

lessly, hardly touched by their influences. The books had a rival, and he communed with them with one eye on the clock. Every little while he would hurry out in front for fear of missing Stephen Frazer.

The last day of the school term came and passed, hardly noted. That night Felix was waiting on the front steps of the library when Stephen arrived. When they saw each other their eyes lighted, but they greeted one another with an air of nonchalance.

They went inside, and Stephen with conspiratorial quietness drew Felix over to a shelf of new books.

"It's probably still here. Yes." He took down a volume of essays by a writer of whom neither of them had ever heard, one Maurice Maeterlinck. "I've been reading this fellow," he whispered, "and he doesn't believe in God either."

Felix took the book eagerly. "I'll read it," he said. "And see here." He handed over a new novel called "The Octopus." "You ought to read this. It's got a lot of stuff in there that you'll like — Labor and Capital and all that."

Stephen looked at it doubtfully. Novels did not seem to him quite worthy of serious attention. Felix, however, urged its claim so eloquently that he generously consented to try it.

They transacted the exchange of books, and fared forth.

"Let's go to Tracey's," said Stephen.

Tracey's was an ice-cream parlour on the Square. As they sat down at a vacant table in the midst of the laughing crowd, the band over in the Square commenced to play "In the Good Old Summer Time." Two girls at the next table eyed them in a friendly way, and one of them hummed provocatively:

"Strolling down a shady lane
With your Baby Mine,
She holds your hand and you hold hers —"

Felix and Stephen placed Maeterlinck's essays and Frank Norris' novel carefully on one side of the little table, and gave their order. "Champagne ice." They ordered champagne ice always. They did not particularly like the taste of it; and they had agreed that it was probably made with an inferior brand of champagne. But the magic of the name served their purpose. It was a symbol — understood mutually without explanation — of the pagan attitude toward life. The flavour that melted softly between tongue and teeth was the flavour of freedom and joy. The icy particles tingled with a splendid rebellion against God.

"I asked them at the library this afternoon," said Stephen, proceeding along a natural train of thought, "why they didn't have the works of Robert G. Ingersoll."

Felix nodded approval. "What did they say?"

"They said there had been no demand for them. I said, well, there was a demand for them now! I felt like asking if Father Murphy's being on the board had anything to do with it, but I didn't."

At the thought of the powers of darkness, in the shape of Father Murphy, holding back the light of intelligence from the whole city, indignation burned in them. They ceased utterly to see the smiling girls at the tables around, they no longer heard the strains of music from the Square. They sat there feeling wronged and frustrated.

They rose at last and went out, avoiding the crowds, seeking the darker, quieter streets where they could talk undisturbed. Their walk led them past the First Baptist Church, and becoming aware of its grey presence, they stopped and looked. . . . A pair of lovers who had been sitting on the dark steps, rose and went away, resentful of this intrusion upon their privacy. Ignoring them, Stephen pointed at the church. "Look!" he said bitterly.

Felix looked, and saw — as though the building were covered with gargoyles — a thousand fantastic and execrable shapes: Copernicus recanting his beliefs about astronomy;

Bruno burning at the stake; heretics broken on the rack of the Inquisition; old women being drowned for witchcraft; children crying out in the flames of hell. In this mild edifice where he had recited dull Sunday School lessons he saw all hatefulness and hypocrisy, all terrorism and tyranny summed up.

"Some day," said Stephen softly, "some one will come along and do what Luther did at Wittenburg."

"Theses!" cried Felix. "Nailed to the door!"

They were silent, while they tasted the glory of that antique heroism; and then there came into their minds a picture of themselves doing the same thing — here and now. Why not?

Felix drew from his pocket the paper and pencil which he always carried.

Stephen dictated: "Whereas the teachings of the church are contrary to those of evolutionary science —"

"No," said Felix. "It ought to be more direct. Something like this: 'We do not believe in your heaven. We are not afraid of your hell. We despise your morality. We hate your tyranny. Your end has come.'"

Sitting down on the church steps, they outlined the document, in the half-light from the electric arc at the corner. Their enthusiasm waxed, then waned. Half way through, they paused, discouraged by a sudden sense of the practical difficulties of the enterprise.

"I suppose it ought to be printed," suggested Felix.

"And signed by a committee," assented Stephen.

"But who is there in town besides us?" Felix asked.

Stephen knew of none other righteous within the city.

"Perhaps," suggested Stephen, "the time isn't ripe for it."

"I suppose not," agreed Felix, and reluctantly put the paper, on which so many eloquent truths were written, back in his pocket.

They vacated the steps and walked away, without noticing

another couple who had been lingering near by and who, as soon as they had gone, slipped quietly into the shadow of the church porch.

Silently, with a depressing sense of all the stupidity and blindness and hypocrisy of their fellow men, they walked to Joe's through the sweet cool air of midnight.

4

"What are you going to do this summer?" asked Stephen, in an interlude in the discussion of sublimer topics at Joe's.

"Get a job," said Felix.

"What kind of a job?"

"Oh, anything — it makes no difference. I'll get fired after a month or so anyway." Felix spoke with the knowledge of experience.

"But what are you going to do after you finish school?" Stephen himself was going to be a mechanical engineer.

"Do?" answered Felix, dreamily. "The same thing . . . get a job and lose it . . . and then another . . . and another. . . ."

"Well," suggested Stephen, distressed but optimistic, "at that rate you're bound to land somewhere."

"No," said Felix. "I doubt it. . . . But I don't have to look for a job until tomorrow. Meanwhile —"

They reconstructed the universe.

XIII The Not Impossible She

I

SATURDAY morning Felix started out to look for work. He had no theory as to where he ought to go, and his feet were guiding him along the accustomed route to the public library when he saw a sign that said "Boy Wanted."

It was, oddly enough, in front of Tracey's. Felix paused, amused at the thought that after knowing Tracey's as one knows it who sits in front of champagne ice, he might now have to know it from behind the counter. The idea appealed to him, and he went in.

It was not in the shop, however, but in the candy-factory on the floor above that a boy was wanted. So he climbed a stairway and found the foreman — a tall, pale worried looking man, who told him the wages — five dollars a week — and when Felix said that was satisfactory, told him to be on hand Monday morning at seven o'clock. He seemed glad to have the matter settled.

So was Felix. He had never found it hard to get a job in vacation time. He was aware that he looked intelligent, and that it was past the powers of a foreman to discern beforehand that his kind of intelligence was not the kind that was likely to be useful in a factory. But he was glad to have it over, so that he could think of other things. . . . His feet carried him on to the public library.

He had noticed, however, that one of the two rooms was full of girls, working at long tables. He commented on this to Stephen that night, wondering what they were like.

"Well," said Stephen gloomily, thinking of the frowsy slaves he had glimpsed in a visit to his uncle's box-factory, "you know what factory girls are like."

But Felix didn't know, and he still wondered.

2

On his first morning at the factory Felix arrived five minutes late — not an auspicious beginning. He had read an exciting book on evolution, lying in bed, until two o'clock the night before, and had fallen asleep after the alarm clock went off, and hurried away finally without any breakfast.

There were, of the half dozen workmen he had seen in the factory on Saturday, only two left, the foreman and a boy a little older than himself — but they were making up for the absence of the rest by being preternaturally busy. The foreman gave him a worried glance, recognized him with a grunt, and with an annoyed gesture told him to wait. He was fiercely concocting something in a little copper kettle over a charcoal fire. The boy, a thin youth, white with starch from head to foot, was pouring hot candy out of a pot with six mouths into a long array of moulds. Felix stood about a few minutes, and then, feeling his idle presence to be out of key with their fervid industry, wandered into the other room.

Instead of the dozen girls he had glimpsed there on Saturday, there were only four. Three of them were seated at one of the long tables, wrapping caramels. The other, a handsome girl of about his own age, with black eyes and hair, stood at the end of the table turning the wheel of some kind of machine. Her sleeves were rolled to the shoulder, and the rhythmic flashing movement of her smooth white arm fascinated Felix.

Seeing him, she stopped suddenly and called: "Here! Are you the new boy?"

"Yes," he said, standing where he was.

"Then come here," she said imperiously. "This is *your* job." The others laughed, and Felix came forward, flushing.

"Is it? I didn't know," he said.

"Well, you know now," said the girl, smiling and taking

her seat at the table with the others. Felix, conscious of appraising scrutiny from critical eyes, took his place at the wheel and devoted all his attention to its operation. He discovered that as the wheel was turned, a knife rose and fell, and a long strip of brown candy was pushed forward to meet the next stroke. When he had cut the candy into strips, he turned them the other way, and the knife sliced them into neat cubes. He pushed the caramels off on to the table in front of the girls, and asked, looking at nobody in particular:

"What shall I do next?"

The black-eyed girl answered, this time with a kind of maternal authoritativeness: "Go to the starch-room and get another strip of candy."

"Where is the starch room?" he asked.

"That little coop in there. The starch-monkey will show you what to do."

The "starch-monkey" must be the boy. Felix found him in the starch-room, and was advised to roll the strip of candy to reduce it to the proper thickness. He did so, and returned. The girls were wrapping slowly the last of the caramels he had cut. As he entered, their fingers began to fly faster. He put the soft brown strip in the machine, and turned the wheel. The knife rose and fell monotonously, and piles of little cubes rolled down upon the table. The girls, with incredible swiftness, with as it seemed but a single movement of the hands, wrapped each cube in a tiny piece of oiled paper and placed it in a pasteboard box — one after another, faster than the eye could follow; and unconscious of these movements, they kept on talking and laughing. One of the girls was telling a funny and mildly shocking story about an incident that had happened on the last steamboat excursion. Glancing at Felix, she chose her words carefully for a minute, and then as he seemed to be paying no attention she lapsed into broader speech. Felix, who had adjusted himself after his own fashion to the situation, was submerged in the tide of his own thoughts. He

awoke for a moment when the story set them all laughing, and then forgot them.

"The foreman!" whispered one of the girls. They became silent, and sat very straight, and worked with even more miraculous deftness. The foreman, entering, stood a moment looking at Felix; then he gave a grunt, indicating qualified satisfaction, and went away. Hardly had he gone when the talk and laughter burst out again. They talked, and Felix thought about evolution, and they all produced caramels by the divine gift of reflex action.

3

It was a week or two before Felix came out of his shell. He had at first been so silent, so apparently unconscious of all that went on, that they had got into the habit of talking as though he were not there at all. He was, for the most part, as unconscious as he seemed. But he would awake from some dreamy abstraction to find himself listening to banter and reminiscence, allusion and comment, which betrayed a franker code of manners than he had known existed among women. He liked it, for it made them seem more human. And as his shyness wore off he startled them with an occasional remark which reminded them that he actually had ears. But gradually, because he had a sharp tongue to match theirs, and could take care of himself in an argument, he established himself in their respect, and they treated him henceforth with an affectionate camaraderie. And he began to see and like them as distinct individuals.

First of all, of course, was the imperious black-eyed girl. Her name was Margaret. She was seventeen years old. She had a variety of charm. Sometimes she was witty, sometimes mockingly tender. An airy, evanescent flirtation sprang up between them — a playful intimacy of tones and glances.

The others were less interesting. Dora was like a schoolgirl, except for her slang and bad grammar. Alice was soft and stupid and kind. Fat Lizzie, who had been twice mar-

ried, had a vast amused tolerance for the weaknesses of men, and a racy way of expressing it. He liked them all, but he set Margaret apart from them in his imagination.

He talked about her to Stephen, who was obtuse to Felix's enthusiasm. "I've no doubt she's pretty," Stephen would say. "Factory girls sometimes are, I suppose."

In vain Felix endeavoured to express to Stephen the special charm of her manner, transcending mere prettiness — a charm that was by turns girlish, boyish, kittenish, and maternal, and always delightful.

"But can she think?" demanded Stephen.

"Think!" said Felix. "Of course she can think!"

"Our thoughts?" Stephen gravely specified.

"Why not?" said Felix defiantly.

"I believe," said Stephen, shaking his head, "you're falling in love with her."

"Oh, no," said Felix lightly.

4

Of course he liked her. Why not? It was delightful to watch her move, to hear her speak. There was beauty in the curve of her eyelashes, and in the soft roundness of her cheek, and a delicious sense of intimacy in the meeting of their eyes — that was all.

But one day a strange thing happened. He had stubbornly persisted, in spite of ridicule — or perhaps because of it — in wearing into the hottest days of July the "sleeve-protectors" his mother had made for him. Margaret had protested that they made her hot to look at them. It was in the noon-hour after one of these jesting discussions about his "sleeve-protectors" that he felt her hand upon his arm, and turned disquietedly to face her. "Stand still," she said, "I'm going to fix you up." He submitted, and she took off the offending things and rolled up his sleeves. Her head was close to his, and her hair dizzied him, and when she had finished and smiled into his eyes, his knees suddenly

became weak. He walked away unsteadily, wondering what had happened to him.

Could that strange new weakness be love?

That afternoon they sang. It began with popular songs of the day, and went on after these were exhausted to songs they had sung at school, and ended with a Sunday school hymn that they all knew. Felix, listening to Margaret's clear, sweet voice, almost forgot that he was an Atheist. "Shall There Be Any Stars In My Crown?" She made even that question beautiful.

Presently the song ended and their eyes met. Sometimes when her lashes shaded them, her eyes seemed purple black; sometimes they had curious golden lights in them. Sometimes they were mischievous, sometimes bold, sometimes wistful. At times they stabbed him so that he had to look away; again they clung to his. Now as their looks met he was conscious of neither colour nor meaning, only that they were touching one another that way.

He did not know how long it lasted, but one of the girls suddenly laughed and said: "See them! See them!"

The laughter and mockery jostled between them, and they looked down.

"Never mind," said Lizzie cheerfully. "We all knew it anyway!"

Felix discovered that his body was beginning to tremble, and to conceal it he walked out of the room. When he returned, the foreman was there and every one was working silently. He went, and still nobody spoke. Felix thought he could tell that Margaret had been crying.

At last one of the girls looked up. "We need some more boxes," she said.

Margaret rose. "I'll get them," she said. "Felix, you come along with me. Let's give them a chance to talk about us." She drew his arm in hers.

Together they went upstairs to the stockroom — a dark emptyish place under the rafters. Margaret knocked the dust from a packing case with her apron and sat down,

leaving room for Felix beside her. He hesitated, then sat down silently.

"Felix," she said softly, "we mustn't mind what they say."

He made no attempt to reply.

She smiled into his eyes. "We can't help it that we're such sillies, can we?"

"No," he replied helplessly.

They said nothing, but groped for each other's hands. There was vast comfort in the touch. After a while she rose, drew her hands softly away, and whispered:

"Now let's get the boxes."

He took them from the shelf, and they proceeded soberly downstairs. Laughing glances met them, but their haughty demeanour did not encourage any one to say anything aloud.

The rest of the day Felix was unusually absent-minded. In the afternoon the stock of caramel candy gave out, and the foreman told him to put some glucose in a certain kettle. He put it in the wrong kettle, and spoiled a batch of marshmallow candy that was almost done.

The foreman was less angry than distressed. "I wanted to give those girls something to do," he said, and set about rectifying Felix's stupidity. The "starch-monkey" confided to Felix, as he stood helplessly about, that he thought they were all going to be laid off at the end of the week. . . .

The closing whistle blew. Margaret usually changed her working blouse for the one she wore on the street without leaving the work-room. But this time she secluded herself for the change. . . . Her eyes were mocking as they parted at the door.

5

That night Felix went for a long walk. He was distressed about enjoying Margaret's singing of the hymn. He decided that he must tell her his ideas . . . about hymns.

Having made this decision, he went to Joe's. Stephen

was there. Of late when Stephen had questioned him about "that girl at the factory," Felix was brief and evasive.

In the midst of the silence that brooded tonight over their sandwiches and coffee, Stephen suddenly said: "I've been thinking about you and that girl, Felix." Felix bridled as at an impertinence, but waited. "After all, if you like her, why should you care whether she's interested in our ideas or not? What chance has a factory girl got to hear about — about evolution? It isn't her fault — and it isn't yours. And there's no sense in making yourself miserable."

"What do you mean?" demanded Felix.

"I mean — well — doubtless she'd like to be made love to. And — well — you say she's pretty. . . . What's the matter?"

"Nothing," said Felix. "I'm just tired. I'm going home."

He rose and put on his hat. Stephen pushed back his cup and rose, too.

"By the way," said Stephen, as they reached the door.

"Well?" asked Felix, pausing.

"Do you remember what day tomorrow is?"

"Tomorrow? Oh, yes."

"Are you going to do what we agreed?"

"Wear a carnation? Oh, yes."

"Well — that's all."

"Good night, then." And Felix walked away.

Stephen stood staring after him. "Well, I'll be darned," he said.

6

The next morning Felix stopped at a florist's shop and bought a red carnation, which he put into his buttonhole to commemorate a day sacred to himself and Stephen as Atheists.

As he walked into the factory, Margaret fixed a quizzical glance on the flower. "Why the posy?" she asked.

"I'm celebrating," he said.

"Celebrating what? The fact that we're all likely to be laid off tomorrow?"

"Somebody's birthday," he said.

"Whose?"

Here was the moment to tell her all the beliefs that he feared held them apart. But he hesitated a moment and fenced for time before he pronounced the name of his hero. "Guess," he said.

She puckered her brows, then laughed, clapped her hands, and cried:

"Why, Bob Ingersoll's, of course! I had forgotten! But it is today, isn't it?"

For a moment Felix believed in miracles. But the foreman came in just then, and the day's work began. There was no chance for any speech of explanation between them. They could only look at each other.

Her look was of mischievous pride in the sharing of a pleasant secret, while his was a burning flash of wonder and gratitude.

7

The explanation, when it came, was a new mystery to him.

"Why," she said, "I was brought up on Bob Ingersoll. My father's a Socialist and freethinker."

"And you never told me!" he said.

"Why should I tell you? You never asked me. But I always knew you were a Socialist, too."

"Am I?" he said.

"Of course!"

It came out that he didn't know there was such a thing as the Socialist party. She clapped her hands. "It will be fun to take you to the Socialist local," she said.

Vistas opened before him.

XIV The Break-Up

I

THE Fay household had been in a disorganized state for the past month, due to the absence of Mrs. Fay. She had gone to visit her sisters on the old farm. They had written several times urging her to come, and it seemed as if a month or two in the country might improve her ailing health. Moreover, the sisters had sent the money to pay for the railroad tickets, which made it possible for her to go.

Mr. Fay, having seen her safely there, was staying with old friends in Harden and Maple. It must have been good, judging from his brief but enthusiastic letters, to be once more among those who had known him as Adam Fay the butcher, and as Banty Fay, the daredevil of Company B.

Meanwhile Jim's rheumatism and temper had got worse. And with only Felix there to look after him — for Ed had married and moved away the year before — and with their rather unskilful attempts at keeping bachelor's hall, the atmosphere of the menage was scarcely pleasant.

Jim did not wish to shorten his mother's visit by complaining of his own troubles, but he was greatly relieved when a letter came from her saying that she was "ever so much better" and that she and "Pa" would be home Sunday. "If this thing was going to keep up," said Jim bitterly at breakfast on Saturday, Felix having let the bacon burn and forgotten to salt the fried potatoes, "I'd go to the Soldier's Home hospital."

Felix remarked that he also would be glad when Sunday came, and hurried impatiently off to work.

He was implicitly certain that Sunday would bring with it a restoration of the family life. Their life had been full of change, but the family was permanent.

2

The warning of an impending lay-off that had been made by the starch-monkey, had spread in whispers through the shop all the previous day. The prospect was discussed resignedly by the girls, and the behaviour of the foreman was taken as confirmation of it. He seemed subdued and apologetic, as though he had been defeated in his effort to keep the shop going. "I don't care," the starch-monkey had confided to Felix, "I'm coming back in the fall. I've taken an interest in things, and the foreman likes me. I'm going to be a candy-maker. You could get to be one too, if you had any sense. But you're too much interested in girls. . . ."

So when they came to the factory on Saturday morning, it was with a certainty that it was to be their last day there, for the summer at least. It was more final than that for most of them. Felix would be back at school. The girls would scatter to other factories. That sense of finality made the day a special one in the minds of all of them. They came early, and stood about talking in low tones with suppressed excitement. It reminded Felix somehow of Graduation Day — except that he had never felt for any of the boys and girls at school the liking he felt for these people. He liked them all — slangy Dora, stupid, kind-hearted Alice, fat and vulgar Lizzie — even the foreman, yes, even the starch-monkey — that incarnate representation of young industrial efficiency, of everything that Felix lacked. And this was to be their last day together.

The girls looked their prettiest that morning, with fresh dresses and ribbons in their hair. Margaret, with a high-piled coiffure of her black hair, had taken on a new dignity that was one more enhancement of her loveliness.

When the clock struck seven they were at their places.

But they all seemed to be waiting for something. And presently the foreman came in. Perhaps he had hoped there would be orders that morning that would justify keeping them a week longer. But he made no explanations. He only paused negligently by the corner of the table, picked up a caramel, dropped it, and said:

"We're going to have to lay you off for the season. You can quit at noon."

He walked casually back to the other room, and conferred with the starch-monkey about a "batch." Everybody felt relieved, and commenced to talk.

The batch which the foreman and the starch-monkey made turned out to be cocoanut candy, which was rolled into tiny cakes, toasted in a gas-oven, and packed into boxes. The girls sampled them shamelessly, almost under the nose of the foreman. Hot from the oven they were a confection which even they, who had quickly lost their taste for sweets, could enjoy. Margaret fed the brownest of them to Felix. She had on an apron, and looked like a charming housewife. As she stood there at the stove with him she was playing at being married — and she knew that Felix understood. Her cheeks became more flushed, and her eyes seemed to have new depths as she looked at him.

Finished with the cakes they went back to caramels, and eked them out with songs. The singing expressed what none of them was able to put into words — the sense of community which comes to unite those who work together. . . .

The last caramel was done at noon. They put on their things, wrapped factory clothes in bundles, and rather awkwardly they bade each other good-bye.

Margaret and Felix lingered a moment after the others. They looked shyly at each other, and she held out her hand. Felix took it.

"Good-bye — Felix," she said. Her voice trembled a little.

"Good-bye, Margaret." He wanted to kiss her, but he could not. . . . In another minute she was gone.

Felix turned back to look for some string to tie his bundle, and then went home.

3

Felix's father returned home Sunday noon, alone. It had been decided, he explained casually, in answer to the surprised enquiries of his sons, that it "would be better for Ma to stay a while longer." No, she was pretty well; it wasn't that. They just thought she ought to stay on.

He broke into a humorous account of the doings of some of his old cronies in Maple and Harden, and they sat down to dinner. Afterward, he lighted his old pipe and his talk slowly came around to the point. . . . Jim at least had anticipated it in his own thoughts. "Ma's pretty comfortable where she is?" he said, rolling a cigarette.

"Yes," came the answer, meditatively, reflectively. "Susan and Jane are getting pretty old, and they sort of like to have Ma around. There's a hired girl to cook and so on. They sit and talk and knit. . . ."

Felix had visited his aunts once, and had a memory of a curious little house with moss-roses growing beside the door, vines on the windows, and a little garden at the back, where a peacock strutted. He thought suddenly of the fact that his mother had always tried to train vines about the porch wherever she lived. . . .

"She seems to like it there," his father was saying slowly.

"Guess she'd better stay there, eh?" said Jim.

"I guess — for a while," said his father.

For a while! Felix suddenly realized the meaning of this slow, desultory conversation. The four years' struggle in Vickley to keep the family together had failed. . . .

"Well," Jim said, after his father had reminisced at large for ten minutes, "I think I'll go to the Soldier's Home hospital till I get over this bad spell."

"They'll take good care of you," said his father. Felix had visited the Soldier's Home in Vickley with his father

several times; it seemed strange to think of Jim there, wearing that blue uniform . . . and yet not so strange. Felix smiled, thinking of how neat that uniform would always be.

After a while his father turned to Felix. "How would you like to stay with Ed, in Port Royal — for a while?"

Felix had forgotten to consider the question of his own destinies. Of course something must be done with him. And of course Ed's home was the only place. "Unless you'd like to stay with your mother a while in the country?"

"No," said Felix. "I'd rather go to Ed's — if he doesn't mind."

"It's just for a few months, you know," said his father.

Presently Mr. Fay announced his own plans. "Alex"— Alex was his oldest brother, now in charge of the old farm — "would like to have me work around there for a while. It'll be not so far away from Ma, for one thing."

So it was decided. They smoked and talked casually on.

4

There came speedily a letter from Ed, and Alice, his wife, warmly welcoming Felix. Jim had gone to the hospital a week ago, and his father had done all he could to see him comfortably settled.

A "For Rent" sign had been tacked on the house. Tomorrow it would be vacated. Felix had in his pocket a ticket for a passage to Port Royal on the steamer "Bald Eagle." The same morning his father would go back to the old farm.

Tonight they wandered about the dismantled house, finishing their preparation for the journey. Felix was brooding in the front room, where a candle standing on a barrel shed a yellow light and made strange shadows on the carpetless floor, the bare walls, the stripped windows. From the next room came the noise of wrenching, and Felix knew that

his father was taking another leaf out of the table — that great table which had contracted leaf by leaf as the family dwindled.

There was a sound of voices in the other room, and Felix knew that some one had come after the table. The furniture — such of it as was any good — had been lent to the neighbours to save storage charges. Only a few things, some bedding and books and dishes, were being packed to send to Port Royal.

His father appeared suddenly in the doorway. "Are you ready for the bonfire?" he asked.

Felix followed him into the back yard. There, in the middle of a big piece of oilcloth ripped from the kitchen floor, was a pile of broken chairs, old hats and shoes, newspapers, rags. . . . His father stirred one corner of the pile with his foot, scattering a mass of old buttons, small cardboard boxes, almost empty spools of thread, pincushions, letters, receipted bills, skeins of wool, broken scissors. . . . "I just emptied Ma's bureau drawers in here, without trying to sort them out," he said. How fiercely, Felix thought, she had defended that accumulation of litter while she was here! That saving of useless things was a part of her valiant struggle to keep things going — and now that struggle was ended.

Felix's father had turned to contemplate something else. "Look," he said, "at this blessed object." It was Ma's "what-not." He stood over it, his head cocked on one side drolly, his little legs far apart, looking like a fat, aged robin philosophizing over a dead caterpillar. "Nobody will take it," he said. "Nobody wants it. I don't blame 'em. Is it any use on God's earth, I ask you?"

"No," said Felix.

"Well, what shall we do with it?" his father asked irresolutely.

"Throw it away," said Felix.

"We've moved it seventeen times," said his father, giving

it a shake. The dust flew out of the crevices of its antique ugliness. "Seems like foolishness to send it to Port Royal," he mused. Yet he hardly dared to destroy it.

"Throw it away," repeated Felix fiercely.

"All right. Just as you say." He picked up one end and marched over to the pile, the dusty scales of the monster trailing after him. It finished the heap.

"Take hold," he said.

They marched down the short dark alley with their burden, and emptied it at the edge of a gulley. A crescent moon was riding behind swift clouds, and its light showed the tin can littered slope, the bluff beyond with its tufts of brown grass, and a little tree which clung to the edge of the bluff, lifting itself away from the dark hollow beneath. While his father knelt arranging the bonfire, Felix followed the path down into the hollow and up on the bluff beyond. Beneath, he could see the black shapes of factories, the long rows of freight cars on the siding, and past that the river, fringed at the farther side by a low dark rim of wooded land. Felix knew the exact shape of that horizon. He had lain there on the bluff in the afternoons of summer, and watched the sun sink through bank after bank of gorgeous cloud until it cut into the horizon with its golden edge. He remembered the shifting crimson, orange, purple and green of that western sky as one remembers music. He stood there a long while, thinking of it, and of the thoughts that had enchanted him as he had watched it. Suddenly into his mind came a phrase with all the magic of those old thoughts in it. He repeated it over to himself: ". . . when the beings that are yet within the loins of man shall stand erect upon the earth and stretch out their hands among the stars. . . ." He made a queer, harsh gesture with his thin arms, as if he were reaching out to touch the stars. And another word floated into his mind from somewhere, or nowhere, a word that had all the splendour of those sunsets in it. He whispered it softly to himself: "Superman!"

The what-not was snapping and crackling in the blaze

when he returned. They silently fed the fire with the remains of the stuff they had brought. It mounted higher, casting a red glare down into the gulley, which was reflected back from tin cans and broken bottles. The wind blew stronger, and the fire made a little roaring noise. The tree that clung to the side of the bluff swayed to the touch of the wind, drooping over the gulley and pulling itself back from it, wrestling and whining. The moon was overwhelmed with black clouds. The two figures drew nearer to the fire.

"I've got to go," said Felix suddenly. "I want to say good-bye to a friend." He hurried off.

5

But Stephen was not at Joe's, where he had promised to be that night for their last talk. After waiting a long time, and consuming several sandwiches that he did not want, Felix reluctantly decided to believe that Stephen was not coming. Doubtless something very important had happened to keep him from coming — so Felix told himself as he walked disconsolately homeward. What could it have been? Felix could not think of anything important enough to keep him away. And then Felix remembered something; Stephen had been talking a good deal lately about another friend of his, a young engineer who had just come back from an exciting journey of exploration in South America. Felix had been invited to meet him, and had declined. He was not interested in the adventures of engineering. Stephen had originally planned to dine with his engineering friend tonight, but when he had learned that this was to be Felix's last evening in Vickley, he had said, "Oh, well, some other time will do for Quinn." Felix remembered this, and felt that he understood the reason why Stephen had not come. Very well; it only meant that Stephen was not as much his friend as he had thought. But he might have let him know. . . .

He shrugged his shoulders; he dismissed the matter from his mind. The fact was that it hurt too much to think

about. Nor did he dare to interpose suppositions in Stephen's defence, for fear of the disappointment which must ensue when he had examined and found them worthless. He dared not believe in Stephen's friendship, precisely because he wanted to so much. Because it was so precious a thing to him, it fell at the first touch. He hardened himself, cancelled the friendship, and put Stephen out of his thoughts. On the way home he stopped at the post-office and wrote a note to Margaret, saying that he was going away from Vickley, and that he would come to see her for a moment in the morning before he took the boat. . . .

Next morning, after the boxes of household goods had gone to the boat, and he had seen his father off on the train for Harden, Felix went to see Margaret. He had known where she lived ever since the first days of their acquaintance at the factory; and more than once since the factory had shut down he had walked past her home, but had not quite had the courage to go in to see her. He had lacked any excuse, except the too true and hence quite impossible one that he loved her. And the more he stayed away, the more impossible it became. As the days passed since that last day at the factory, she had become tantalizingly alien and mocking in his imagination. Without her sweet and friendly presence to reassure him, he began to accuse himself of ineptitude in his behaviour toward her. Things that Stephen had said — things that people were always saying about girls — came back to him, and he wondered if he had not made a mistake in failing to make love to her. Had she expected it? He began to suspect that he had cut a ridiculous figure in her eyes, by reason of his timidity. He remembered the teasing glance with which she had once parted from him at the door, on the day when they had for the first — and, he said to himself with a pang of self-reproach, for the last — time, held each other's hands. He imagined her as laughing at him for not kissing her then. She had wanted him to. She had lifted her lips like a flower — and

he had missed his chance. He had never had the chance again.

She had offered herself once, and that was enough. A stanza from an old ballad came to his mind . . .

" There is a flower that gleameth bright,
Some call it marygold-a,
And he that wold not when he might,
He shall not when he wold-a! "

Doubtless she had dismissed him from her regard, as a novice and a bungler. . . . It was the inrush of cold accident into his life, and the toppling of the whole structure of his social existence before it, that evoked again his childish helplessness and fear.

But yesterday, after the bonfire in the gulley, and the failure of Stephen to keep their appointment, his need for love brought very vividly to his mind the warmth and sweetness of Margaret's friendship, and he had written to her, if shyly, yet in complete confidence. He must say good-bye to her before he left. An anticipatory dream of the beauty of that farewell filled his mind as he went to her home.

It was a neat little house on Grove street, set back in a pleasant yard. Though he had identified it before, he again made sure of the number, and then ran up to the door and rang the bell.

A kindly-looking woman opened the door. He asked, a little breathlessly, for Margaret. He did not say who he was, nor did Margaret's mother ask. The letter which he had sent the night before had by ill-luck not yet been delivered. And Margaret, as it happened, had slept late after a party the night before, and had just come sleepily down the stairs in petticoat and chemise. Her mother made for her what seemed to be the best answer. " She isn't at home."

" Oh ! " said Felix, bewildered, and backed away. The woman smiled, and closed the door. Felix started slowly

back to the gate. He saw that he had made a mistake in postponing his visit till the last day, and coming at such an hour. Probably she was at work, in some other factory. Where? If he knew, he might still go to see her there. He wished he had asked. He turned, half way to the gate, and looked back at the house doubtfully. Then — it was only for a fleeting instant, but unmistakably — he had a glimpse of a face at the window. Margaret's! Two black startled eyes gazing at him — and then gone. He hesitated, asking himself if he had seen truly — and then turned and went on.

He did not want to believe what he had seen. It hurt.

He passed the postman, a little way up the block, bearing his letter to Margaret. Five minutes later, hastily dressed and with his letter in her hand, Margaret flew down to the gate and looked up and down the street. But Felix was nowhere in sight.

He spent his last two hours in Vickley wandering disconsolately among the bookstacks at the library. Then he went to the dock and boarded the steamer *Bald Eagle*.

Book Three

Port Royal

XV Loneliness

I

FELIX made his entrance into Port Royal without a hat. He had lost it when the *Bald Eagle* made a sudden turn around the bend of the river below Port Royal. Felix had not noticed what was happening, and the wind, which takes such delight in playing jokes on absent-minded people, seized his hat and flung it gaily overboard. Felix had not noticed the change in the course of the boat because he was thinking intently of something else. He was thinking of a poem he had made up about Margaret in the interval between that last day at the factory and his ill-fated visit to her home. He had not wanted to think of it; he had not wanted to think of her at all. He tried to put her utterly out of his mind. But gnawing at his consciousness was the fact that he had a copy of that unfinished poem in his pocket. He remembered it with shame. It was the sheerest schoolboy silliness, he realized now. He blushed to think he had written it. He thought he was ashamed of it because it was bad poetry, but in reality he was ashamed because it was a confession of his folly in having cared for her.

A day ago its lines had glowed golden in his imagination; now they were only a record of and a rebuke to his vanity. He must destroy it. He took it out, and tore it across.

Then he decided that he must face his folly — and he forced himself to open the torn paper and read the poem one last time before he threw it away. He quivered with the self-inflicted pain as he read the mawkish sentiments.

I envy the breezes that dally
In the ringlets of thy hair —
Those wayward locks that rippling dow
Are jewels of the ebon crown
That decks thy brow so fair.

"My God!" he said. He could force himself to read no further. He tore the paper hastily into tiny pieces, and dropped them overboard into the stream, the cleansing stream which carries so much refuse to the sea. It would take away these torn fragments of his folly; already they were lost to sight — and he would be free for ever from the painful memory of it. At that moment the wind took his hat.

A hat is singularly a part of one's personality. One feels foolish without it. Felix felt particularly foolish. It was as if his hatlessness were a confession to the world of the whole painful experience he had just gone through. He had wanted to forget it, and here was this to remind him. People would wonder where his hat was, and he would remember how he had come to lose it. Why was he such a fool? With a sense of his ridiculousness he stepped off the gangplank on to the dock.

His brother Ed was there waiting for him, an eager smile on his kindly face. "Were's your hat, buddy?" was his greeting. Felix flushed and replied, "The wind blew it into the river." "Well, we'll get you another one," said Ed, and led him to a hat-store. Decently clothed again and able to look his fellow-men in the face, Felix accompanied his brother home. On the street car he answered questions about the family.

Ed lived in Sobieski street, within walking distance of the factory where he worked. They soon arrived at the place. It was one half of a double house that looked exactly like half a dozen others up and down the block on both sides of the street. It was distinguished from the others by its number — 1206 — and by the plaster cast of George Washington which could be seen between the lace curtains in the front

window. Alice met them at the door and kissed Felix warmly. She sat them down in the parlour, and Felix answered all the questions about the family over again. Felix noted on the walls two of Ed's old drawings — one the picture of a wounded hawk falling from the sky — an early picture, a memory of hunting days in Maple; and the other a recent one, a very wooden copy of some one's celebrated painting of Pharaoh's Horses. On the sofa, ranged at careful intervals, were cushions embroidered in coloured silks with birds and flowers, made by Alice in the course of many patient Sundays, after the designs set forth in some woman's magazine. Above the mantelpiece, for some mysterious reason, hung a blue pennant with "YALE" in white letters. There was a book-case, with a tea-set in it which had been won at a raffle and never used. There was a phonograph, and a pile of records, the one on top being "Hello Central Give Me Heaven."

Felix regarded this milieu with a secret disdain which he could not understand. He ought to be grateful to Ed and Alice for giving him shelter; but he only felt out of place, a stranger. His mother's house, with its rickety old furniture, he had fled from to the more congenial atmosphere of the library; but he had returned to it as to his own place; it was his own place — it had somehow centred about him. His mother had made that true. This was not his home; he was an unwilling guest.

After he had been shown the house, he was led out into the tiny backyard, where Ed had planted a kitchen garden which yielded six kinds of vegetables. Ed was very proud of it, and Felix could see him in imagination hurrying home from his hard day's work at the factory to dig in it. "Yes," said Ed, "it helps out a lot."

When they came back to the house Felix asked casually where he had better look for work. Ed stared at him in surprise, and Alice answered indignantly that he was not going to work, he was going to school. It seemed that they had taken on the burden of the family tradition that Felix

must "finish his education." Then, with a further assumption of maternal privilege, Alice commented on the state of Felix's clothes. "Since your mother has been away you haven't been looked after properly," she said. It was true, his trousers were not pressed, and the ends of his trouser-legs were frayed.

"You must take care of your clothes if you want to look like a gentleman," she said smilingly.

Felix laughed, and Alice, sensing something satiric in his laugh, asked a little sharply, "What's so funny?"

"The idea of my looking like a gentleman," said Felix.

"You can if you want to," she replied reprovingly. She liked Felix. If he paid attention to what he was told, he would be a very nice young man.

Alice returned then to the business of Sunday dinner. After it was over, the Underwoods came in with their baby, and Ed went for some beer. Charley Underwood worked at the factory with Ed. He was a thin young man with a large Adam's apple. His wife was a pale, frail-looking girl. Their baby, in defiance of all probability, was fat and prodigiously good-humoured. It lay on the table blinking and beaming, while Mrs. Underwood and Alice talked of fashions, the care of babies, and housework. Then, over the beer, they talked about a picnic they had all gone on last Sunday. Finally the women drifted away for more intimate converse, and Ed and Charley Underwood talked baseball and politics. They were both ardent partisans of Teddy Roosevelt and of some local baseball team.

To all this talk Felix had nothing to contribute. He evaded their occasional efforts to draw him into the conversation, and sat silent and moody, watching the fat Underwood baby, so unreasonably happy in its starched white Sunday clothes. When they turned on the phonograph, he escaped to the front porch.

2

The next day Felix went to the public library. It seemed alien and inhospitable, in spite of the fact that everybody was allowed to go straight to the book-stacks and pick out their books for themselves. But it seemed that he had lost his old sense of refuge among books. He was lonely.

The next week, school opened. The strange surroundings, the new teachers, the different text-books, created a brief excitement of adjustment for Felix. But it was not long before he found himself able to slip through the school day with a minimum of effort; and again, with a world of time on his hands, he found himself lonely and unhappy.

In spite of his determination to put Margaret out of his mind, he thought more than once of writing to her. Sometimes he thought he would ask for an explanation of her refusal to see him that morning; and again he thought he would treat the matter as a joke, or else ignore it altogether. The trouble was that there were two Margarets — one the girl he had known, and to whom he wished to write in all confidence; the other that strange, mocking creature whom he had glimpsed at the window, and whom he wanted never to think of again. He could not decide which of them was the true Margaret; and he ended by accepting both as true — one in the world of his dreams and the other in the world of reality. He would not write to the Margaret who inhabited the hostile world of reality; but he would write to the other, and not send the letters. He did; and once, on a sudden impulse, he carried a bundle of these letters down to the letter box at the corner, determined to send them and see what happened; but as he raised his hand to the box a cold fear stopped him, and he hurried home and burned the letters, and thereafter wrote no more of them.

Instead, he wandered about the streets. One Saturday he came upon an "Art Gallery"— so denominated by a small placard in the window. Entering, Felix found on the bare walls of the empty room no sign of art, but the

gentle old man who came hurrying out of a little room at the back informed him that the place had been converted into a reading-room. There were no signs of anything to read, but upon further inquiry by Felix the old man said he would show him some books and papers. He hesitated about doing this, however, and finally confessed that the place had now become a lecture-hall. This suited Felix quite as well, and he demanded to know what the lectures were about.

In a low voice, after an appreciable pause, the old man replied, "Atheism!"— and stepped back to observe the effect of this word upon his visitor.

Felix was delighted. Was it possible that there were enough Atheists in Port Royal to hold public meetings? Yes, there were twenty-nine, he was told. To Felix this seemed like a large number. Unconsciously he imaged twenty-nine people like himself and Stephen and Margaret. It seemed too beautiful to be true.

When was the next meeting?

Wednesday night; would he come?

He would.

3

He did.

He came happily, with a grateful sense of having at last re-found a part of the life he had left behind in Vickley. He realized now what a varied and complex and humanly attached life he had led for the past few months back there. He had been part of the human process — and for the first time, gladly a part of it. The severance of those bonds had left him feeling strangely isolate. He had, without realizing it, lost his old self-sufficiency; he had known, obscurely but satisfyingly, the feeling of communion with the race. And then suddenly he was detached and flung out into an utterly alien world.

Once upon a time his loneliness had been only fear and dislike of the world. Now loneliness was a need, an ache, a desperate inarticulate yearning.

He was the first to arrive at the "Art Gallery," except the old proprietor himself, who was busy setting out folding-chairs for the audience when Felix entered. It was a beautiful October evening, with a full moon that transfigured the streets and houses, and a warm wind that was laden with the scent of dead leaves and the smoky incense of bonfires. But Felix hurried in gladly to the meeting-place, and eagerly helped the old man set the chairs for the audience, which began to drift in, one by one. First was a stout German who, as he informed Felix, kept a delicatessen store. He was, the old proprietor explained, a new addition to their ranks; his hatred of preachers had been discovered in a conversation over the counter, and the hospitality of the Agnostic Society had been extended to him. He seemed a little ill-at-ease, and explained to Felix that he had been very much interested in these subjects when he was a young man in Germany; since coming to America he had been busy earning a living and had got out of touch with "de Agnostik mofement." But he disliked the way preachers were always trying to close the saloons. A little beer did nobody any harm.

Felix politely agreed, and was introduced in turn to six others. One man kept a second-hand book store, another was an accountant in a bank, and a third was a Jewish tailor; these three were all small, stoop-shouldered and past middle age. Then came a woman, a shrivelled old lady with bright eyes, mussy grey hair, and a partial deafness which kept one bony hand always to her ear. A young workingman, tired but intelligent-looking, hurried in, looked disappointed at the small number of people present, and distributed handbills announcing a public meeting shortly to be held in defence of some labour-leader somewhere who had been unjustly sent to prison. He talked to Felix about this in a heated but reasonable way, and Felix tried to follow his argument; but the young man made the mistake of assuming that Felix knew what he was talking about, and Felix was ashamed to admit his ignorance, so the whole

thing remained rather obscure. Last of all there came a sleek, rather pompous man, dressed in an old frock-coat. He spoke to every one with a slightly orotund and oratorical voice. This was the lecturer of the evening. He handed Felix one of his cards, from which it appeared that he was by profession a doctor.

These nine people sat about for half an hour, waiting for more to come; and when at last it was agreed that no more were coming, the lecturer mounted the rostrum, and a hush fell upon the little assembly.

"The subject of my talk this evening," began the lecturer suavely, "is Christian Lies."

He let this sink in, and then began to quote a passage from Genesis. "And God said, If ye eat of the fruit of that tree, ye shall surely die." But, asked the lecturer impressively, did they die? They did not! The Bible admitted that they did not. The Bible contradicted God. He would leave it to his audience which was the most worthy of credence.

The audience tittered a little, and the deaf old lady asked the man next to her what he had said. She was told, and nodded bright approval.

The lecturer went on right through the books of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelations, not neglecting Jonah and the whale. There was something oddly familiar about the lecturer's technique; it haunted Felix's mind, until suddenly he remembered that book, back in his past, which had essayed the destruction of Atheism — the book which a preacher had lent him. It was the same method. You proved that Atheists were fools, and that Christians were fools, in just the same way. That book had had upon Felix an effect opposite to the one intended; and this lecture —

Felix wished the lecturer would talk about something else. He knew that every one in the audience knew already all that the lecturer was telling them. Yet they sat and listened to it with apparent pleasure. There was something

oddly reminiscent about that, too. The analogy flashed upon his mind. It was like a church!

The lecturer paused and asked for questions. Under the guise of asking questions, the three small, elderly, hump-shouldered men got up and made speeches. The second-hand book dealer pointed out that the Christian religion was made up piecemeal of dozens of other religions. Somehow he reminded Felix of Solomon in one of his more depressed moods, declaring that there is nothing new under the sun. The Jewish tailor, like a minor prophet, rose and prophesied woe to the hypocrites and robbers who thought that by building churches and sending missionaries to the heathen they could cleanse themselves of their own sins. The accountant made a more philosophical and at the same time a more dismal speech, pointing out in sad tones the rashness of those who sought to know what Herbert Spencer had declared to be the Unknowable. So far as we could tell, he said, progress was the chance result of blind forces, the existence of the human race an accident, and the earth itself a speck of dust in an incomprehensible chaos. In short, he seemed to Felix to agree with Ecclesiastes that All Is Vanity.

The lecturer jumped up. He had more to say, it seemed. Felix did not really feel that he cared to hear it. He rose and stole quietly out, preceded by the young workingman and followed by the delicatessen store keeper.

The three halted upon the steps, and looked at each other.

"I've got to beat it to a committee meeting," said the young workingman impatiently.

The delicatessen store keeper sighed. "I guess I go home and drink a little beer and go to bed," he said.

They wandered off in different directions.

Felix watched them go with an obscure sense of envy. At least they had somewhere to go.

He had nowhere. This refuge, too, had failed him.

And then a tormenting and yet intoxicating stanza rose in his mind, a fragment of a poem he had read in a magazine at the library. He suspected that it was bad poetry

— romantic foolishness, almost as absurd as that stuff he had torn in pieces and thrown into the river that day on the *Bald Eagle*. But still it tormented and soothed him, and he said the lines over to himself as he walked homeward:

> *"Give me thy lips, and from my own that trembling*
> *Meet their warm breath, dash the cold cup of pain;*
> *Their dewy fire shall melt all my dissembling*
> *As Polish frosts die in the tropic rain!"*

XVI Rhythms

I

ONCE more, against his will, he found himself thinking of Margaret. A great rush of longing, breaking down the barrier of assumed indifference, swept over him, and he yielded himself to poignant memories of the days he had left behind. He went about painfully entranced with dreams of the past. But still these dreams would be shot through now and then with intimations of an alien and hostile reality. He tried to face the question of what Margaret was really like. But the only way to end the debate in his mind was to write to her, and he dared not do that.

Then, as if by some medicinal instinct, he turned to poetry, the thing which had reawakened the sleeping hurt in his mind, for some cure of it; and he began to find consolation in the measured beauty of lines which expressed his own doubts and desires. The debate over Margaret yielded place to an enthusiasm which was in itself to a large extent simply a more magnificent expression of just such a debate. He went about with a mind stored with splendid sonorities. Late at night he might be seen, a boy of sixteen, dressed in an ill-fitting blue serge suit, walking along the bridge that extended over the Mississippi River from Port Royal to Stone Island. Policemen would pass at intervals, swinging their clubs, pairs of late lovers would emerge slowly from the darkness into the glare of an arc-light. He went past them, walking rapidly, his head bent. Where the bridge came to an end, a stone walk began that skirted the end of the Island toward Garth, where the darkness was burst open at sudden intervals by the scarlet flare of a blasting-

furnace. Felix paused and leaned over the parapet. . . . Was it Margaret there at the window that day? Had she recognized him? . . . He put up a hand to a wet forehead and brushed back his damp hair. A phrase glimmered into his mind, five words from some poem —*"moon nor cold nor dew"*— and he straightened his shoulders and turned towards home. *"Nor all cold things can purge me wholly through."* His strides grew longer, keeping time to the majestic rhythm of the lines. *"Assuage me nor allay me nor appease."* He whispered them over and over. *"Till supreme sleep shall bring me bloodless ease."* The policeman passed, eyeing him sharply, unnoticed. *"Lotus and Lethe on my lips like dew."* The lovers, overtaken, stepped from his path impatiently. *"Thick darkness and the insuperable sea."*

Behind him the furnace flares lighted the sky at lurid intervals. His solitary tramp sounded noisily on the bridge. He emerged from the fantastic shadowy tangle of girders, upon the streets of Port Royal. Bathed in an enchantment of beauty, he walked swiftly along the homeward streets, whispering aloud the words that eased his heart.

2

Sometimes, as he walked, rhythms rather than words came into his mind, rhythms which he could not identify with any poem he knew, and he fitted words to them — words meaninglessly beautiful. These fragments of beauty snatched somehow out of the void intoxicated him boundlessly. New rhythms sang themselves into place beside the old, and new words suddenly glimmered into being. He did not realize that these things had any relation to the art of poetry. They were to him simply a kind of blessed drunkenness.

And as he walked, in the afternoons and evenings, making these queer, formless poems, he began to look about him and take note of what he saw. Port Royal was one of three river towns which lay close together — Garth and

Stevenson side by side on the eastern shore, opposite Port Royal, with Stone Island and its government arsenal nosing in between. The three towns, so closely united, were almost one city; but yet they were as unlike each other as possible. Stevenson was commonplace and uninteresting. Garth was a nightmare — the inconceivably hideous product of unrestricted commercial enterprise; its centre was occupied by the vast, bare, smoke-begrimed structures of the greatest plough-factory on earth; a little fringe of desultory shops, insulted and apparently pushed aside by incessantly switching trains of freight cars, gave way to a drab, monotonous area of cheap and hastily-constructed workingmen's dwellings, each house exactly like the next, street after street and mile after mile — while afar, set almost inaccessibly upon the hills like the castles of robber barons, could be discerned the houses where the plough-magnates lived. The town of Port Royal was like neither of these towns.

It had a kindlier aspect. Its long tree-shaded streets, its great parks, its public buildings, even its shops and homes — even, after his first jaundiced impressions had been forgotten, the very street on which Felix lived — had a kind of dignity and serenity, as though in this town it was understood that life was meant to be enjoyed. Felix began to feel that he could be happy in Port Royal.

3

It was while he was immersed in such a mood of unwonted confidence in Port Royal, that he picked up one afternoon on the street a little red-covered pamphlet. It was a Socialist pamphlet. But of all possible introductions to Socialism it was the strangest; and to Felix the most alluring one that could have been devised. It said not a word about economics. It told about Greek ideals of beauty in art and life; and it was illustrated with photographs of two Greek statues, the Venus of Melos and the Discus-Thrower, which were interpreted in the text as examples of the gloriously

alive and happy nature of Greek manhood and womanhood.

To desire to live like that — to want a world in which such life was possible — to be willing to put aside whatever institutions, ideas, beliefs, denied men and women such lives: this was to be a Socialist.

Felix remembered what Margaret had told him one day in the factory — that he was a Socialist. If what this pamphlet said was true, then of course he was a Socialist.

He pondered the pamphlet. Its discovery proved the existence of Socialists in Port Royal. He must find them.

It occurred to him to ask his brother Ed. Oh, yes, Ed replied, he had heard of them here.— Did they have meetings? Ed supposed so.— Where? Why, probably at Turner Hall.— Ah!

Felix went to Turner Hall the next afternoon. It was an imposing building, with four entrances. Felix hesitated, then entered one of them at random. It gave upon the lobby of a theatre. The man in the box-office knew the prices of seats for the German play that was to be given there that night; but apparently he knew nothing else.

So Felix tried the next entrance, and found himself suddenly in a gymnasium, where a bloomered class of young women were at that moment engaged in turning handsprings. The director plainly regarded Felix as a rash intruder, and refused to give him any information about anything. So Felix backed out, apologizing.

The third entrance revealed a flight of steps. Felix went up. At the first landing he encountered what seemed to be the janitor; but the man seemed not to understand English very well, so Felix explored for himself. There were many lodge-halls at the top of the first flight of stairs, with no sign to indicate that any of them was a Socialist meeting place. Felix went on from door to door, entering and looking about. He did not know exactly what he was looking for; but whatever it was, he failed to find it. Nevertheless he continued to look, and having exhausted the possibilities of that floor, went on to the next and the next.

On the top floor he broke in upon an assembly of German matrons. They seemed angry and suspicious, and Felix went downstairs in great embarrassment.

But he had not given up. There was still another entrance.

It opened upon a saloon. The busy bartender admitted that he had heard of the Socialists, and in a reflective interval in the serving of drinks he seemed to remember that they met on Fridays — in just which hall he couldn't say.

4

On Friday evening Felix stood again in front of the building. A multitude of people came and went, in and out. There was something discouragingly real about these people, something emphatically unlike what he wanted Socialists to be. Suddenly doubting, but with an access of stubbornness, he followed them up the winding stairway, and watched them enter one and another of the little halls. He conceived the project of knocking and inquiring at each door in turn. The number of doors, however large, was still finite, and in time he would come to the right one. But the too-too solid aspect of the people he saw within, sobered him. He could not face their stolid unimaginative stares forty times. He went slowly downstairs, and again took up his position by the door. But now he was too discouraged to ask any one for news of what he wanted to know; he waited, as if he were expecting some one to come up and tell him. Perhaps his feeling was that if there were such people in Port Royal as the little red pamphlet had described, they would recognize their fellow in him. But no one came up and greeted him. No one recognized him for a seeker after that lost Greek beauty of flamelike life.

At last he went home. But next Friday evening, having nothing better to do, he went again, this time without any confidence, and with only a faint hope which he was ashamed to credit. He hung about the doorway till the crowd thinned and ceased, and the street was deserted. And then, when

Felix was wondering whether he should keep up his futile and foolish vigil, a man came out, paused, and looked at Felix in a friendly way. He was a young man, with a slender figure, delicate hands, and a sensitive, intelligent foreign-looking face. Felix instantly imagined him to be a poet, a man whom it would be delightful to know. He stared at the man intently, and then became embarrassed as he realized what he was doing.

The man smiled in what seemed to Felix a faintly satiric way, and then turned and sniffed eagerly at the evening breeze. "Too beautiful a night," he said, "to stay indoors at a committee meeting!"

Felix afterward reconstructed the incident in his imagination as it should have happened. In this revision of the story, Felix replied heartily, "Much too beautiful!" and added—"Yet I was considering going in to a meeting."—"Well," said the stranger (for in this imaginary account it was made quite clear that the man wanted to talk to Felix) "You had better reconsider it and take a walk instead." And Felix had said casually, "Are you going up this way?" —"Yes, through the park," and they had sauntered off together — talking presently of poetry. . . .

But nothing like that occured in reality. Felix stood silent, too starved for friendship to dare believe that this man was offering it to him.

The stranger, undeterred by Felix's silence, added with a gesture, "See — the moon!" And as if that gesture, or the words, or the singularly beautiful tune of the man's voice, had called it into being, Felix became aware of the great white moon over the roofs — aware too of the breeze with its odours of cool dampness — aware of the poignant wonder of night.

The man stood looking at Felix, and smiling faintly — but, as it seemed to Felix, a little satirically. The thought that he had revealed that sudden rush of emotion to hostile eyes, came freezingly — and struck Felix wordless.

Then, after a moment's pause, the stranger made a little

signal of farewell — an unmistakably friendly signal — and saying "Good night!" started to walk away.

"Good night!" said Felix, and wanted to rush after him. But shame held him fixed on the spot. And then all the beauty which this man had seemingly unloosed, flooded in upon him. He felt himself alone, defenceless against the beauty of the moonlit night. It stabbed him, tortured him. He turned homeward at last, walking quickly through that merciless beauty in which he was alone. . . .

He stopped suddenly, realizing that the figure which he was overtaking was that of the man who had spoken to him. He might, quite naturally, catch up with the man and talk with him — find out if he were indeed the blessed companion which it seemed chance had sent him out of the night; but something kept him from doing this. And as he loitered along behind until the man had passed from sight, a phrase came into his mind from nowhere.

As each one passed I scanned his face.

Felix walked on slowly.

And each, methought, scanned mine.

He framed the words with his lips, and whispered them to the sky.

Each looked on each a little space,
Then passed and made no sign.

Linking phrase to phrase, he strode on unseeing.

And every cold glance answered Nay!
Would no one understand?
None brush the cobweb bars away,
Stand forth and clasp my hand?

But as into each face I peered,
My glance was cold as theirs,—
That they whose scornful look I feared
Might pass me unawares.

He was happy with a strange happiness that was made out of pain. Night, the moon, the shadows of the trees, the wind with its strange scents, all the beauty that had tortured him, became his thoughts, became his emotions, became himself.

UCPHS

XVII To Nowhere and Back

I

THROUGH streets that were not the streets he knew by day, down light-and-shadow-enchanted ways, Felix wandered by night, making his songs. He knew now that he was a poet.

He wrote many poems that winter. They had at first strange titles, half reminiscent of his paleontological researches —" Atlantis," " Runes," " Babylon," " The Dogs of Light," " The Other Side of the Moon," and a whole series called " Uxmal Fragments," which he pretended to himself were translated from Mexican hieroglyphics. But they were all about himself.

With his bookish instinct, he lettered them carefully in little booklets made out of drawing-paper folded and sewed together with cord. On the covers he made fantastic designs in coloured inks.

He had found happiness at last. It seemed that he entered, at first only for moments, and then for long golden hours, an enchanted land in which there was neither desire nor fear — only the solace of magic words.

He grew indifferent to the outer world. It seemed less real to him than this realm of dreams into which he was able to transport himself in an instant.

And he was not lonely in that realm, for he was companioned by a shadow, soft and vague — a mere hint or whisper, so unobtrusive it was, of a being almost without sex as it was almost without existence, yet faintly breathing the perfume of girlhood — a delicate and perfect comradeship. She had not been there, and then one day she was there; and the difference was so slight as to be almost imperceptible — yet there she was:

Midway of that enchanted ground
There is a lazy well-sweep found,
And dreamy waters, at whose brink
On summer noons we stop to drink.
Out underneath the listless boughs,
Down in the grass, the shadows drowse,
And all the indolent slow hours
No breezes come to wake the flowers,
Or cast a ripple in the lake
To writhe, a ghostly water-snake.
And there for you and me is peace,
Where passions fade, ambitions cease;
For all the loves and hates that toss
The helpless soul, come not across
The far-off purple hills that lie
A-swoon beneath that sapphire sky.

2

But, shadowy and unreal as was this faintly implied She, her presence in this enchanted ground, like that of Eve in an earlier Eden, threatened its peace. It was as if she had stealthily brought with her the fruits of reality, the bitter-sweet apples of the tree of life.

It was for this reason that his poems became so antique in their pretences. As if he realized that in permitting to Her a suggestion of contemporaneous reality he had spoiled his paradise, he took her hand and fled with her to ancient Greece, where she became Helen — and he the unknown captain of the bark in which she sailed away from Sparta with her Trojan Prince. In this disguise he could admit that he loved her. Indeed, as *her* victim, he could take some pride in the inevitable disaster which the love of woman brought. *Why do the ruin-hurling Gods not smite? For I too have loved Helen!*

Then, lest she turn and smile upon him, he fled to Babylon: but not alone — she was there as Semiramis. He was her greybeard magician, keeper of the knowledge of the most ancient tablets, yet tricked by her into drinking a love-philter which made him her slave. Again he fled, this time to Atlantis. She was its Virgin Queen and he her Harper. He sang to her the ancient warning prophecies which foretold

the doom of Atlantis whenever its Queen should touch her lips to the lips of another. And she had leaned forward smiling, and said, "Kiss me!"

Backward and backward he had retreated, into the innermost caves of fantasy, taking with him this fearful and beautiful antagonist. He had escaped from Greece, from Babylon, but now, in the last reaches of the world of dreams, amid its uttermost shadows, they stood face to face in final contest. She was all that he hated and feared and could not give up; she was reality, and pain, and heart-break, she was the world of difficulty and danger, of hope that turns to despair, of ambition that ends in failure. She was Life, mocking, malign, and alluring. "Kiss me!" she said.

3

With that dream-kiss burning on his lips, he groped his way out of the wreck and ruin of his dream-world into the light of common day. He knew two things in that moment. He knew that he feared girls because they would demand of him something other than dreams. And he knew that he would surrender to that demand.

What! would you go with empty hands,
Unlaureled head, to where she stands,
And mark the look of sheer surprise
And easy scorn in her young eyes?
"Do you think that I will give," she'll ask,
"My love to one who leaves his task,
Who shuns the field of combat, quits
The battle ere 'tis well begun,
And all the drowsy summer sits
Blowing his bubbles in the sun!"

He must live in the world of reality. And that meant that he must go to work. At what? But here realism failed him.

He could not choose between different kinds of work, because he hated them all. He would work at anything. And that meant going to work in some factory.

He envisaged himself as a factory-hand. He had no illusions about being able to rise from the ranks. He would remain a factory-hand, and an ill-paid one. . . . He saw himself falling in love with some girl at a factory; marrying her, having children, and living in a little house like his brother's, just like all the others on both sides of the street up and down the block. His backyard could be different, if he wanted to plant a garden there, like his brother's. His brother's garden was better than any of his neighbour's. Felix realized that his garden would be different, too — it would be the worst garden on the block in which he lived. It would be worse because he would be thinking of poetry instead of potatoes. And if he thought of poetry his pay-envelope would be too small for his wife to get along on, and she would nag him. By that time she would have ceased to be pretty. . . .

It was not a cheerful prospect. But life was like that — real life. And there were consolations, else why did people keep on living?

He was walking through the streets as he thought these things, and he stopped in front of a window to look at the crimson and gold wings of a dead butterfly pinned to a card, with the legend, "We can't all be butterflies." No, Felix reflected, we can't. Not even butterflies can. For those wings, which that shopkeeper foolishly thinks are mere ornaments, are part of the serious business of life to that butterfly. He must wing his way to the nectar cup for his dinner, and attract his mate and follow her; and when that is finished, his destiny is accomplished. He cannot drink any more nectar, for his thorax contracts; Life is through with him, and he dies. . . .

They know thee not, who deem thy hues
The splendid appanage of pride,
As on some idle pleasure-cruise
Thou seemest royally to glide
With summer's soft and languorous tide
Down crimson-bannered avenues. . . .

He walked away, framing the words into rhythmic sequence.

Yet is that fancy dear to me!
It is not good to look around
And see no single creature free
From these chains wherewith I am bound.
I still believe that thou hast found
Release from laws men think to be
Relentless, from the dreary round
Of . . .

Of what? The phrase eluded him. . . . He had reached home. He stood in front of his brother's house, seeing in it and in the life lived within, a picture of his life to be. That was his brother's fate, why not his? Why should he ask something better — something like the fancied life of the butterfly? Yet he did. . . .

And if in bitterness and scorn
I walk the ways my fathers trod,
Thou, flashing through the perfumed morn,
Shalt be my plea to God!

4

His proposal to quit school and go to work was met with indignation by Ed and Alice. And when he insisted that it must happen sometime, Alice offered a realistic counter-proposal. It contained her secret dream as to his future.

It would be wrong, she said, for him to go to work in a factory. She had often wished that Ed had learned to do some kind of office-work. By all means Felix should go into an office. It would be better for him to finish his schooling, of course. But if he wouldn't do that, the thing to do was to go to a business college next summer. . . . She foresaw a brilliant future for Felix in business. It was only necessary to get a start. He had ideas. He would be appreciated. But he must first learn something about accounts, and business correspondence. . . .

Felix said coldly that he would *not* go to a business college, and went out to look for work. He knew that what

she said was true. Why, then, did he not follow her advice? Was it because he felt that as a factory-hand he could still cherish his dreams in secret, while in business he must utterly give them up? . . . He went to a candy-factory near his brother's home, because he had worked in such a place and felt more at ease in asking for a job there. The man in the office seemed to look at him with a favourable eye, but pointed out that this was a bad time to look for work. Many of the force had been laid off at Christmas, and work would be slack until next summer. If he would come around in June they would try to find a place for him.

When Felix returned home, Ed renewed the discussion, urging him to continue going to school this year at least. His own prospects would soon improve, and Felix need not think they could not afford to have him there without working. As a last argument, he added: "Your mother would not want you to leave school, Felix."

Felix, baffled and impatient of the difficulty of doing something that he did not want to do, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "Well — all right!"

5

He returned to his booklets. He found it possible to put in endless hours with the lettering and the designs on the covers. One evening, when he was drawing a gaudy butterfly on the cover of one of his booklets, Ed stopped beside him, looked at the drawing, and praised it. Then he took up the booklet and glanced idly inside.

Felix held his breath. To him this poem spoke so clearly of his feelings about such an existence as Ed's own, that he felt detected in disloyalty. He watched his brother's face anxiously for any sign of reproach. The benevolent placidity he saw there encouraged him.

Ed handed the poem back. "Did you write that?" he asked.

"Yes," said Felix, half apologetically.

"It's very pretty," said Ed. "But if I were you I wouldn't use that heavy stub pen to ink in that drawing. You'd better get a croquill."

Felix was relieved. It appeared, then, that if one wrote in rhyme, it was as if one wrote in a foreign language; no one else understood it. To others this was not an intimate confession; it was simply — a poem.

Emboldened by this experience, and no longer afraid that some one would look over his shoulder and discover all his heart, Felix ventured to use his spare time in school for the purpose of revising and finishing his poems.

He had time to spare. Quite unwittingly and almost wholly undeservedly, Felix had gained at school the reputation of being "a shark" at most of his studies. A series of accidents had given that impression to teachers and pupils alike. He was clumsy at algebra; but on one occasion, when his teacher had been playing bridge very late the night before, she made a mistake in demonstrating the problem; and Felix, in his eagerness to set her right, took the chalk from her fingers and worked it out on the blackboard swiftly and correctly. His "nerve" served to dramatize a gift for mathematics which he did not in fact possess. His history teacher had been equally impressed. Felix's mind did not easily retain dates and names, nor the events of history in the precise sequences in which they were recorded in the text-book; but he found that when he had forgotten to study his lesson he was able to acquit himself with credit by discussing the events they were dealing with, in the light of other historical works which he had been reading out of school hours. Similarly, in other classes, he had gained a reputation for cleverness, of which he was quite unaware. . . . Still less was he aware that presently everybody in school knew that he was writing poetry.

But one day the next spring, when Felix had spent the study hour revising a poem, the teacher in charge caught his eye, and beckoned him to his desk. At the same time he

made a gesture which indicated that Felix was to bring him what he had been writing.

A long-forgotten memory of the principal at Maple flashed into Felix's mind, and for a moment he was overcome with sick, childish apprehension. But this man was his history teacher, a genial and friendly soul. Felix was not afraid of him. . . . He picked up his paper and went to the desk.

"I suspect," said the teacher, "that this is a poem you have been writing?"

"Yes, sir," said Felix.

"May I see it?"

Felix handed it over. He did not believe the teacher would understand its real meaning; he hoped not — and yet there was a faint awkward hope that he would. He could not help saying the lines over to himself as the teacher read them, and it was with a sense of almost indecent exposure that he stood and waited.

The teacher looked up. "Very good, I should say, Felix."

Felix sighed with relief. The teacher had taken it simply as a poem. Felix felt clothed again.

The teacher was speaking. "Would you mind if I kept this until tomorrow? I want to show it to Mr. Hibben." Mr. Hibben was the teacher of "English," a study which Felix had in some way escaped being required to take. Felix assented, and went back to his seat wondering.

6

The next day he found out. The history teacher asked him to stay a moment after the class period, and then explained to him that the school was sending a volume, representative of the school work, to the World's Fair at St. Louis. He had heard that Felix wrote poetry. He had shown Felix's poem to Mr. Hibben, who was his roommate, and they had both thought it would be an excellent idea if Felix would write a poem for the volume. . . . Of course, it ought if possible to have some relation to the work

of the school; and he himself thought it would be fine if Felix would write a historical poem.

Felix went away from that interview in a most agreeably fluttered state. He had never dreamed of his poems being important to any one besides himself; not important, exactly, but useful — think of that! — and a credit to the school.

As for a historical poem, he had never thought of writing such a thing; but if his history teacher thought he could, why, he must not be disappointed.

Felix would write a poem for the World's Fair Book.

XVIII Helen Raymond

I

THAT afternoon he hurried to the library and read hastily and excitedly a volume on the Moors in Spain. He had decided upon a subject for his historical poem.

Then, with his head full of pictures of the marble courts that were to be splashed with blood, the flower-beds that were to be trampled in massacre, the busy looms that were to be smashed to bits by savage Christian hatred, the scrolls that were to be flung into bonfires, all the pagan beauty and joy and wisdom that were to be destroyed, he composed as he walked the streets a bitterly ironical "Ballad of the Moors' Expulsion." . . . It was, indeed, beneath its historical guise, a poem about himself — though he was unaware of it: a poem about going to work — the triumph of reality over the dream. The paradise destroyed by Christian hate was his own paradise.

Where fountains toss their flashing spray,
And roses glow serene,
Where lute and viol charm the day,
And minstrels chant unseen,
Vultures shall quarrel o'er their prey —
Ravens, and beasts unclean.

In spite of a note of atheistic mockery at the end, which Felix feared the authorities might not like, the poem was accepted for the World's Fair Book. Felix enjoyed the appreciation of his history teacher, and of Mr. Hibben, who stopped him in the hall to praise the poem. He had showed it, he said, to a little club of literary people to which he belonged, and they had thought it a remarkable piece of

work. Felix reported these things at home, and read the ballad to Ed and Alice.

The auspiciousness of this occasion was somewhat marred by the discussion that followed. With the best of intentions, Alice brought up the question of business college again, and gently urged it upon him. He had a great future ahead of him, she said — if only he would be sensible. Felix began inventing arguments against business college, and when he could think of no more he rushed petulantly out of the house.

He declared passionately to himself that he was sorry he had written that poem. It was as if the blossoming branch that he had plucked in paradise and brought into the land of reality had been grossly handled by alien hands. . . . Yet he could not help being glad that he had made Ed and Alice proud of him!

2

Felix had a private view of the World's Fair Book, a magnificent volume in green tooled leather, containing an array of maps, drawings of flowers and birds, and pages of neatly written Greek, among all of which his own neatly lettered poem still seemed to maintain an air of distinction. He took one last look at it, handed back the volume to the history teacher, and the incident seemed closed.

But among the members of the little literary club to whom Mr. Hibben had shown the poem, was Miss Raymond. Miss Raymond held the position of chief librarian in the Port Royal Public Library. Felix did not know her. But he would have been thrilled to learn that her eyes had looked upon his poem. He had seen her afar — that is to say, as she came and went about the library with a light step, disappearing all too quickly into that secluded and sacred region, her private office. He knew her name, and her official position. But to him she was not so much the librarian as the spirit, half familiar and half divine, which haunted this place of books. She might have been evoked by his imagina-

tion, even as were the shining spirits of wood and stream in an earlier day. She had, like these books, a spirit above the rush and stress of common life. Something in her light step, her serene glance, personified for him the spirit of literature; she *was* its spirit, made visible in radiant cool flesh.

More lately he had noted her quick, whimsical smile, and heard her soft, impetuous speech. But he had never thought of her as quite belonging to the world of reality. He knew librarianesses, and they had been kind to him. But of her as having any relation to himself he had never dreamed.

And now suddenly, breaking through the invisible veil behind which she had moved, she appeared to him as a person, a woman, tall, slender, beautiful, smiling, holding out her hand.

"You are Felix Fay, aren't you?" she said. "I am Helen Raymond."

3

For months Helen Raymond had had glimpses of the slim brown-haired boy who prowled constantly among the bookstacks. It was part of her duty, as she conceived it, to encourage people who showed any enthusiasm for books — not merely by official helpfulness, but by revealing herself to them as a fellow-enthusiast. But in this boy there was something which had made her hold back from a too-casual friendliness. She had taken pains to learn his name. She would have spoken to him — but she felt his shyness, and respected it. She said to herself laughingly that she wanted a "human" excuse for speaking to him.

And now the occasion had quite magnificently arrived. Mr. Hibben had shown her his verses. He was, then, a poet! She might, she reflected, have guessed it. She awaited his next appearance at the library, and came straight down to him. . . .

Felix was dazzled.

They talked, standing there between the tall bookstacks.

Or rather, if Felix talked he was not aware of it. He was listening, bemused. She had read his poem. It was beautiful, and she wanted to see more of his work. Would he bring his poems to her? They must have a long talk soon — very soon. She wanted to be his friend. . . .

He went away intoxicated, and was hardly conscious of the outer world during the period that intervened before their promised talk.

He delayed his coming till the second evening, lest he seem precipitate. He sent in his message to her, half hoping and half fearing that she would not be there, or that she would be too busy. Yes, she was there; he was to go right in.

He entered her office, and sat down in the chair beside her desk; but of the room itself he was scarcely aware. Her smile and her eyes had swept a magic circle about them. He was in a dream.

He was so much in a dream that her first words, after their greeting, seemed strange.

"Tell me about yourself," she said.

There seemed to be nothing to tell. It was as if she had known about him always, as though they had always known each other; and why was she pretending that they were strangers? He roused himself and tried to reply. But he knew that what he was saying did not matter to either of them. He felt held aloof by her attitude of complete smiling attention. Her words, for all their friendliness, had the accent of that formal courtesy with which one treats a new acquaintance. Yes, she was being polite to him! He was annoyed.

She felt this. She knew exactly what was going on in his mind; she knew, because she, too, had felt that way. But, she said smilingly to herself, some formality is not unnatural in a young woman upon the occasion of her second meeting with a young man!

She smiled, but she maintained the barrier.

But it was not as man to woman that Felix had come to

her. It was as worshipper and child to some lovely and infinitely maternal Goddess.

She could not but recognize that this was so; he had betrayed it instantly in his attitude, in his devoted and helpless gaze of utter confidence and trust and dependence. It had given her, indeed, a moment of panic, and this was her instinctive response. She was *not* going to mother him!

And then, as suddenly as it came, his swift unintelligible anger against her vanished, leaving him ashamed of himself and of his tongue-tied silence.

She asked more questions, prompting him. She learned, what she already knew from Mr. Hibben, his age. She learned how long he had been in Port Royal; from whence he came; and that his father was a butcher —"by trade," Felix said, using the phrase which served in such catechisms to veil decently the family ill-fortune.

Had he been writing poetry long? Why had he begun to write poetry?

He — didn't know why, exactly.

Impasse. . . .

It was only when she began to talk of books that his tongue untied itself. He discoursed eloquently of his enthusiasms. In poetry — when she had succeeded in drawing him away from biology and ethnology — he showed singular gaps in his reading. He had read all of Southey — and nothing of Keats! Of Shelley, he liked best the Masque of Anarchy; the Sensitive Plant had bored him, and he had never finished it. He disliked Shakespeare. He had a curious admiration for Byron's English Bards and Scotch Reviewers. He had never heard of W. B. Yeats; yes, he had, too — only he had supposed the name was pronounced "Yeets."

He spoke with calm assurance of a book of poems of which she had never heard "The Shropshire Lad," as the best poetry in the English language.

He admired Heine tremendously. (Yet he said he could not read German!)

He declared that Rossetti could not write sonnets; and named a certain Wilfrid Scawen Blunt as one who could!

He esteemed Herrick a better poet than Milton.

He quoted Verlaine — almost recognizably:

"Il pleur dans mon coeur
Comme il pleur sur la ville"—

but insisted that he did not read French!

It seemed at least a partial explanation of this chaos of enthusiasms when she learned that he had never read poetry until the last year, and had been reading it *all* since then — at the rate of several poets a week!

Her little desk-clock struck a silvery chime in an opportune silence, and he stood up, suddenly realizing that he had stayed a long time.

She took up the bundle of poems he had brought with him. "I shall read these tonight," she said. "Will you come and see me again — very soon?"

He went away with a strange sense of bafflement and hurt. He explained it to himself as he went home by saying that he had stayed too long and talked too much.

XIX Initiation

1

HELEN told herself that she liked him. He was an odd child, she mused, on her way home with his poems under her arm. She remembered the way he looked when he went out. . . . His talk, with its curious mingling of erudition and ignorance, so infantile in some of its cocksure judgments and so uncannily mature in others, had obscured his essential character for a while; but the look of him as he left her had revealed him again as she had known him first. . . .

She had in that instant made up two phrases, which with their humour half concealed and half expressed her sense of him. "The Compleat Idealist"—and: "There, but for the grace of Miss Atkinson, go I!"

Miss Atkinson had been one of her teachers at college—a crabbed old woman who had flung dart after dart of steely irony at Helen's "dreamishness" until she had learned to hide it. . . .

And again that night, when she read his poems, there was a fluttering of poignant sympathy in her. She saw in these poems for a moment the shy, groping child. . . .

She read on, listening to these pitiful and obscure cries of longing, until suddenly she recovered herself. "This won't do," she said. "I want to *help* him."

So she read them all over again—critically. There were beautiful things in them; and many serious defects. . . . She thought out what she would say to him.

2

At their next meeting she said the things which she had thought out. They were not exactly what she wanted to

say, it seemed, when the time came; but she said them.

Felix had no clear idea of what happened on this occasion. But he had gone there as a child to his mother — and he came away painfully grown up.

She had praised his work. And it was precisely her praise that hurt. . . .

He did not understand, and he called himself a fool; but he said he would not go to see her again.

Yet he did go to see her again. He went as often as possible, though always in a sense unwillingly. And each time he went, he took to her a new poem.

Through the beautiful months of spring he wrote many poems, each as an excuse which would permit him to see Helen Raymond. Without such an excuse he never came.

It was as if she had forbidden him to come, save as a poet. . . .

Once he stayed away, wilfully, a long time, weeks, and then, when perforce he returned — it was on his seventeenth birthday — it was with a new poem called "The Gift." He explained to her — and half believed the explanation himself — that it had been suggested by a passage in a novel of Merejkowski's.

A perfect little ship I made
With patient hands and eager heart —
From silken sail to carven keel
The flower of boyish art.

I did not launch it on the bay
That stretches calm and blue so far
You wonder if it is a dream
That any tempests are.

I came and bore it in my hands,
And kneeling laid it at your feet —
Then rose to meet your glad caress,
Than any thanks more sweet.

But now instead you strangely spoke
Anent the little gift I brought,—
Saying it showed an artist's skill,
So craftily 'twas wrought!

The thirst I had not known was there
Such words as these would never slake;
And it was worthless now, the gift
You praised, but would not take.

If you had never looked on it,
But only kissed me on the lips,
That rudely-whittled block had been
A marvel among ships!

But now, when you had turned away
Praising the product of my hands,
In bitterness I flung it down
Upon the ruined sands.

I tore the purple sail across,
I snapped the polished mast in twain.
For if it merited but praise,
My labour was in vain!

3

Helen read this new poem of Felix's with a distrait mind, her thoughts returning to certain plans she had been making for his benefit.

She had by now forgotten, except as an impression of quaint awkwardness, how Felix had seemed to her at first. He had indeed grown up amazingly in these few months. He had lost a great deal of his shyness, he could talk more easily, his eyes no longer had that lost-doggie look of painful and obscure pleading — in a word, he was more mature. But he needed further readjustments with the world in which he lived. He needed other friends, besides herself. He needed her friends. . . . When she had duly praised his poem, she spoke to him of them.

She had told them about Felix, and they wanted to know him. They were, she said, the kind of people he ought to know. One was a young novelist. Tom Alden. His first novel — had Felix seen it? — was a most unusual book. She would look up a copy for him. The other man was a poet. Doyle Clavering was his name. His poems were here in the library, too. He had shown great interest in Felix's work. . . . She went on to speak of "a little din-

ner." Tom Alden's wife ("a beautiful and charming woman") had suggested it. He must come over to the Aldens' some evening, very soon, and meet these people; or, as she put it, they would meet him. . . .

Casually as it was put, it was nevertheless an obviously flattering scheme. These people, charming and intellectual, wanted to meet him! He was to set the date, and invite any one else he wished!

That they would all like him, that they liked him already, Helen tried to leave no doubt. And for a moment he believed it. He had simply to walk into and take possession of this new world, the world in which he belonged.

His poems were the open sesame to a wonderful world of friendship with poets and novelists and beautiful women. . . . A new life had begun for him.

4

Nevertheless, it was only superficially that Felix was flattered and delighted. Secretly, and almost unknown to himself, he was angry and hurt. It was as if he did not want any other friends — as if Helen Raymond's offer to share him with them were a kind of disloyalty.

It was in an obscurely hostile mood that he read Tom Alden's novel and Doyle Clavering's poems.

The novel failed to reveal to him the impatient and fiery soul which Helen knew in its author. And Doyle Clavering's poems, Felix said in a very small whisper to himself, were not as good as his own. . . .

And yet he *was* pleased, and a little incredulous, that these distinguished people should want to know him.

Not less pleased and proud, Ed and Alice looked at his clothes anxiously, and held a secret conference as to the possibility of getting him a new suit. But it could not, apparently, be done, and as the next best thing Felix was persuaded to wear Ed's best coat for the occasion. It was of blue serge, like Felix's own; and if the sleeves were a trifle too long, that was better than having them away too

short. Excited and inwardly reluctant, Felix was started off to the Alden house on the appointed evening.

He rang the bell at exactly seven o'clock, having walked around the block twice and consulted his Ingersoll watch at every moment to make sure. He was warmly greeted by Mrs. Alden, and inducted into the drawing-room, where he slipped on the smooth floor and had to walk carefully. In confusion he shook hands with what seemed a vast roomful of people. All his faculties were in eclipse; he did not hear the names of the people he was meeting, and had no idea which was which. . . . Helen hurried in just then, and he fixed his eyes on her in a sort of baffled and hopeless trust.

He would have been astonished to learn that he gave the impression of being a very self-possessed young man. He thought he was behaving like an idiot.

Presently they were all seated at the dinner-table. The service was simple, but Felix was embarrassed by unfamiliar articles of cutlery, and it was not for some time that he discovered his napkin hidden beneath his plate. There was a salad — the first salad that Felix had ever seen. He rashly refused the mayonnaise, not knowing what it was for. Mrs. Alden casually offered it to him again, but he felt obliged to stand by his original action rather than confess a mistake. He desperately ate his lettuce plain, as if he preferred it that way; but he thought everybody saw through his ruse, and was secretly laughing at him.

He was at first silent; and it was his impression that he remained so throughout the evening. But as a matter of fact Helen managed the conversation so skilfully — she knew upon what subjects Felix would and would not talk — that he perforce took part in it almost at once. He did so unconsciously, his whole mind being occupied with a memory of that bungled salad.

After dinner they all went to a great, cool, comfortable "attic" room. Felix, sitting down at once, became aware that the other men were still standing, waiting until the women were seated. Felix turned scarlet, but remained

desperately in his big chair. He looked at Helen, across the room. Mrs. Alden, at his side, said something about poetry, and he replied with a long, clear-cut sentence, which might have been written in a book rather than uttered in conversation. Socially, Felix was in a state of collapse — except for Helen, he saw nobody in the room; but his powers of speech were curiously liberated. He was in a daze, alternately shot through with red flashes of shame at his clumsiness, and cooled by the sea-blue of Helen's eyes across the room. The slippery floor, the salad, and that last piece of ineptitude here in the attic, chased each other through his mind like nightmares; and all the while, in utter unconsciousness, he talked. When he ceased, it was on a period, and suddenly.

There was a startling effect to this talk, so unlike human conversation. It was as though he were reading aloud. . . .

At midnight the party broke up. The others remarked to their hostess what a nice time they had had, and bade a special and kindly good-bye to Felix, asking him to come and see them; which so confused Felix that he slipped past his hostess without a farewell greeting. He was on the steps when he realized his omission; he turned uncertainly, but he was afraid he would bungle the affair still more if he went back. So he stumbled down the steps and ran home, cursing himself for a clumsy fool.

XX The Art of Writing

1

THE next day after the party, Felix went to Helen's office and asked her forgiveness for the way he had behaved.

"Forgive you for what?" she cried. "You did beautifully. You talked wonderfully!"

"But I didn't say a word!" he protested.

"You talked about everything under the sun," she said laughingly. "Anthropology, history, poetry — heaven knows what. I never realized you knew so much!"

He had brought her a poem, but she put it aside as something of minor importance. "Now it's begun," she said, "and you must keep it up. Go and see Tom Alden and Doyle Clavering this week."

Felix shook his head. "I don't think they want to see me again."

"Ridiculous boy!" she said.

2

Felix was perhaps half right about Tom Alden. He went to the Alden house twice, and Tom talked poetry with this strange youth for an hour each time; but neither of them profited by the discussion.

Tom's wife had lightly hazarded the opinion that Felix might be a genius, but genius was a thing too bright and good for human nature's daily food. Her own tastes were more simple, inclining, she added, to real human beings like "this fellow Tom here!"

Helen had urged Tom beforehand to be nice to Felix, and he had only said enigmatically, looking speculatively at her:

"Nice? Are you quite sure you know how to be nice to a poet? Poets are kittle cattle, Helen." And now, after the event, Tom said to Helen reflectively: "I ought to like him. But how can you like a person who *isn't there?* I like everything he says. But there doesn't seem to be anybody saying it. Darn it all, Helen, he isn't real! He's like a sprite, a — a fay!"

With Doyle Clavering, Felix succeeded a little better. He found that Clavering could teach him something about writing poetry — the patient and critical process of revision. He came to feel a great respect and liking for Clavering, and under his tutelage his poems grew day by day more an artistic product and less an irresponsible mode of self-expression.

Meanwhile he continued his visits to Helen — as wistful and baffled as ever. He began to try to find flaws in her; he noted with a savage joy the bad taste of her two-column-to-the-page edition of Shelley. The lovely hand-tooled binding which she had proudly shown him, only made the lapse more glaring. To put a beautiful binding like that on an unreadable, dictionary-like edition of a book of poems! . . . Yet he could not stay away from her.

Both she and Clavering were looking forward to the publication of some of his poems in the magazines. Both of them regarded acceptance by a "good" magazine as having significance. But to Felix the process by which this goal was achieved, made it seem dull and vulgar. Clavering had described to him his "record-book," in which he put down the statistics of his poetic career. He told of one poem which had "been the rounds" of all the magazines, not merely once, but twice — and was finally accepted, the third time, by the *Century*. It was this anecdote which suddenly gave Felix a revulsion against the career into which he was understood to be entering — and a sudden bitter anger against Helen.

She had been waiting for the "right" poem with which to begin publication. And he had devoutly accepted her

sense of rightness as divinely just. Now, however, he felt that she had betrayed him into the hands of the enemy — she was only waiting for a poem which the editor of the *Century* would like! It was for him that Felix was revising his poems, not for Helen, least of all for himself. . . . He felt that he had been fooled again.

He wrote a poem which he did not dare show her for a long time — he did not quite know why. . . .

When shall I cease to take delight
In forms of transient grace? —
Will-o'-the-wisps that all the night
Flicker before my face!

O sometime shall I not be less
A creature of desire,
With gain of autumn happiness
For loss of April fire?

Nay, I was sent a wanderer
On Beauty's desperate quest —
To go for ever seeking Her,
Nor, ere I find her, rest.

And this last form, so frail and fleet,
Whereafter run tonight
My weary and enamoured feet —
So dear it seems and bright! —

Now, having lured me once again
O'er wild of hill and dale,
Shall this last foolish fantom wane,
This beacon fade and fail. . . .

But past the fantom flames I see
The waiting face of Her
For whose high sake one well might be
God's weariest wanderer!

At last he took it to her, as an excuse for seeing her.

She was radiant with delight. "This," she said, "will do for the *Century!*"

3

Felix went out from Helen's office to wander in the streets. But tonight he was not unconscious of the world. He was

acutely aware of it. It was Saturday night. He looked in the shop windows, he looked at the passing crowds, he looked at the faces and bodies of pretty girls. He paused in front of a faker vending some marvellous knife which would peel potatoes and core apples without waste, all with a simple twist of the wrist, ten cents, a dime. Felix was wondering if perhaps that way of making a living were not painful to the man. The same words over and over, the same thin trickle of dirty dimes, night after night. . . . Surely he would not voluntarily choose that career for himself: he must inwardly loathe it. And then it occurred to Felix that the shops into whose windows he had been gazing were a part of the same scheme. The passing crowds were a part of it — every man among them did the same, essentially the same, sort of thing for a living. Even the girls whose beauty had touched and allured him were using that beauty in the effort to secure a home, just as this man was using his stale jests, his catch-penny phrases, over and over, to the dull crowd.

Felix lingered until the crowd thinned out, the street-vendor went away, and he was left at last alone on the corner with a short fat little old man whose face was unshaven and upon whose vest were the stains of last week's soup. Felix laughed. The man looked at him.

"Life is funny, isn't it?" He did not want the man to think he had been laughing at *him.*

"Funny?" replied the man, and appeared to consider the matter. "Well, if you can just continue to think so, you're safe. If Nietzsche had had a sense of humour, he wouldn't have gone mad."

"Did he go mad?" asked Felix.

"Yes. Absolutely batty." They walked off together. "You see, he was lonely. You have to find common ground with other people. So you have to take sides with them against yourself."

They finished their talk in an office in which the man slept. He was a chiropodist. His name was Wheels. He

had a philosophy of his own. . . . The world was ugly and cruel — essentially so. It always had been and it always would be. He despised the reformers who thought they were making it better by their "poultices"; while as for the Socialists, who hoped to cure it altogether, his scorn for them took the form of a profound chuckle. They were at least amusing, so egregious was their folly. . . .

But though life was evil, there were compensations. Of these, the best was Ignorance; but only those who were so fortunate as to be in a position, at least for the time being, to inflict rather than to suffer cruelty, could be really ignorant of the nature of things. That had not fallen to his own lot. And the second compensation, that of Forgetting, in the intoxication of wine and women and art, was also denied him: "I have a weak stomach, I am fat and old, and I have a curious defect of my senses which makes me colour-blind and tone-deaf, so that I can enjoy neither wine, women nor art." He was reduced to dependence upon the final compensation, Laughter. . . .

"But you," he said to Felix, "have good senses, and moreover you are neither fat nor old. My philosophic laughter will not satisfy you long. But while you need it you are welcome to come and sit with me and grin at the tragedy of the universe."

Felix talked with him till midnight, and went home refreshed as by a bitter tonic.

4

The poem was, after consultation with Clavering, despatched to the *Century*. Clavering felt that the ending "might be stronger," and Helen was inclined to agree with him. Their clairvoyance, it appeared, was marvellous. The editor wrote that he thought the ending "weak," but seemed quite favourably disposed toward it otherwise. "That means," said Clavering, "they'll accept it if you change the ending."

"I don't know how to change it," said Felix. "I don't

know what you mean." Clavering explained, but Felix was still in the dark, though Helen seconded the explanation.

Thus the matter lay for a week, in which Helen guiltily tried to change the ending in conformity to her idea — just to show Felix what she meant. She let Clavering see her attempt, and with a deft stroke or two he had perfected it. Very hesitantly she showed it to Felix.

"I mean, that's the *sort* of thing," she said.

Felix read it. *"I follow wind and bird and star, and cloud for ever flown."* Strange, cold phrases; and "for ever flown"— how silly! *"The fluttering hem, the flying hair, the call and cry of One these eyes shall see not, though I fare onward from sun to sun!"*

Helen looked at him anxiously, fearful to have hurt him by this tampering with his poem. He looked away. He wanted to drop the whole affair on the spot, and let the *Century* go hang. But — was it that he felt that Helen secretly wanted him to refuse to compromise, and that he must act in defiance of her wish? Or was it that he wanted to think she wished that, and dared not put her to the test?

He groped for some objective reality to hold fast to, and the phrase "twenty dollars" came into his mind. It was what he would get if he sold the poem; Clavering had told him so.

He turned back to them, smiling. "I think you know best," he said, "and I do want to sell the poem, and the way you have phrased my idea seems to me quite beautiful — I can't think of any way to improve it — so if you don't mind, I guess we'll just send in this version as it stands."

Helen sighed.— Was it a sigh of relief, or of disappointment? "You're sure, Felix," she said urgently, "that you don't mind?"

"Mind? No!" he laughed. "I'm very grateful to you both, and I hope the editor has sense enough to know a good poem when he sees it, without"— he glanced at Clavering —"making us wait two years."

He went out, repeating to himself, "twenty dollars, twenty dollars."

5

A week later he visited the fat philosopher in his office. They talked of many things, and along towards midnight, apropos of something or other, Wheels tried to quote a line from the Garden of Proserpine. He quoted it incorrectly, and Felix took it up and repeated it to the end. "You write poetry yourself, perhaps?" suggested Wheels.

"No," said Felix. "I *did*. I had my first poem accepted today."

Wheels looked at him shrewdly. "Don't let that discourage you," he said. "Let's hear it."

Felix recited the poem, giving his own version, with the change of a single word:

But past the fantom flames I see
No waiting face of Her
For whose high sake one well might be
God's weariest wanderer.

"I must go home now," said Felix. "Tomorrow's Monday. School ended last week. I got a job yesterday, and tomorrow morning I start to work."

XXI Work

1

FELIX had wasted no time in choosing the kind of work he was going to do. He had gone back to the candy-factory where he had been told there might be something for him in the summer. A man in the office, after looking him over and referring to a memorandum on his desk, sent him to the stick-candy department on the fourth floor. As Felix went from the office into the factory, his nostrils were at once assailed by the familiar odour of sweets which lay heavily over the whole place. On his way to the elevator he saw rows of aproned girls furiously and skilfully dipping chocolates. He had a glimpse of dozens of men and boys at work on the different floors, and was a little awed by the vastness of the place. It would not be like the cosy little factory in Vickley, where the girls sang at their work. And how impossible it was to imagine, among those rows of intent, chocolate-smeared workers, another Margaret! That episode seemed like an idyl out of his lost youth.

He interviewed the foreman, and was immediately hired at seven dollars a week to run a "vacuum pan." The foreman was thus enabled to lay off that afternoon a youth who had worked there since the preceding summer, and had risen to fifteen dollars a week.

2

On Monday morning, Felix reached the factory at half-past six, as he had been instructed. There was no one in the whole place except the surly Swedish janitor who took Felix up in the freight-elevator, and the man waiting on

the fourth floor to teach Felix his work. This was one of the candymakers Felix had seen there on Saturday — a big, plump man, like an over-grown baby.

"Are you the new man?" he inquired pleasantly, but with a sarcastic intent which he emphasized by looking Felix up and down.

"As it were," Felix replied ironically.

"Well," said the big fellow, "step over here, as it were, and I'll show you, as it were, what you're to do." He led the way to a great closed vessel of shining copper that stood against the wall, flanked on one side by a large open kettle and on the other by a small steam suction-pump. The fat-bellied vacuum-pan with its radiating pipes seemed to Felix like a great red spider at the centre of its web.

It appeared that it was Felix's job to feed this monster with sugar and glucose, once every hour, ten times a day. The candymaker proceeded to weigh out the first "batch" — forty pounds of sugar and sixty of glucose. He hoisted these ingredients to the edge of the open vessel and spilled them in, one after the other, with a graceful gesture of his big arms, stirred them together, and turned on the steam. In ten minutes it was cooked enough to be drawn into the closed vessel and cooked again, while the pump kept the steam-pressure down below the danger-point. The big candymaker explained the theory of it to Felix, and it all seemed simple enough. The man merely stood watching the thermometer and the steam gauge. When they had arrived synchronously at certain figures, the batch was done. The heat was shut off, the engine stopped, and with the jerk of a metal arm projecting from underneath the vessel, a flood as of molten gold poured out into a kettle that stood underneath.

At the same moment the seven o'clock whistle blew, people suddenly appeared at their places all over the great room, and three other candymakers came up. Two of them seized the handles of the kettle, carried it swiftly to one of the stone-topped tables, and poured it out. The

big candymaker divided it into portions, and they commenced to knead coloured powders into it.

Trying carefully to remember the precise order of operations, Felix started to work on the second batch. He had been told that this one was "fifty-fifty." It was all he could do, he found, to lift fifty pounds of sugar or of glucose to the edge of the open vessel. And he discovered, when it was cooked and drawn into the vacuum-pan, that the heat and steam-pressure would not reach their destined figures without constant management. Reaching up hastily to one of the cocks by which the heat was controlled, Felix burned his arm against a steam-pipe. And once, when the big candymaker had strolled up to see how he was getting along the suction-pump suddenly stopped. "What does that mean?" Felix asked, turning helplessly to him.

The big candymaker gravely pointed to the dial, where the hand was flickering around toward a place marked DANGER. Felix looked, sprang at the recalcitrant piston and struck it with his fist. The engine started again, and the dial hand sank back.

The big candymaker nodded approval, and added, "That engine's cranky. Sometime she'll stop, and you won't be able to get her started again. I suppose you know what'll happen then."

"No," said Felix.

"The whole thing will blow up, and one hundred pounds of red hot candy will hit the ceiling. If you're underneath when it comes down, it might"—he looked Felix over critically—"spoil them nice new overalls."

Felix looked upon the engine henceforth with grim respect. He finished the day with no untoward difficulties, but felt too tired to visit his friend Wheels that evening, as he had intended.

The next morning, after he had cooked his first batch and weighed out his second, he strolled over to spend his leisure in watching the men pull the candy. It was a kind of

taffy-pulling on an enormous scale, ten or twenty pounds to the lump, flung over iron hooks set in the wooden pillars, and caught and flung back with a swift and graceful motion which he could not but admire. This time, however, the big candymaker cut off a portion and tossed it to Felix. He caught it innocently, and both men laughed when he nearly dropped it. He had forgotten that it was so hot! But he dared not drop it, so he threw it hastily and with all his might over the nearest hook. But he had to catch it and throw it back again instantly, or it would fall to the floor.

The pain of the molten candy on his unaccustomed hands seemed unbearable, and he cast a wild look about for help. The others were grinning at his discomfiture while with indifferent ease they tossed their candy over the hooks. But that glance showed him that they had dipped their hands in starch. With a quick flaming anger at their cruelty in letting him go at the work with naked hands, he set his teeth, feigned indifference to the pain, and pulled with desperate steadiness. The candy cooled quickly, but by the time it was finished he had eight blisters — one on each finger-tip.

"How do you like it?" asked one of the candymakers, a little Dutchman.

"Very amusing," said Felix, and walked away. But the big candymaker called him back. "How's your stock of glucose? Running low, isn't it?" Felix looked. It was almost gone. "Then you'd better hustle down cellar and get another barrel."

Searching for glucose in the long, rambling cellar, Felix was reminded, in a flash of memory, of that long hopeless search he had once made, as a child in the Maple school, for the mop. The analogy threatened not to end there, for when he found the glucose, rising barrel after barrel and tier after tier in the half darkness, he was overcome with a deeper sense of that same childish helplessness. The nearest glucose barrel was held down by a pyramid of

seven others, each weighing three hundred pounds. Felix weighed a hundred and twenty-five.

"It's like moving the earth," he said to himself; and then, with seeming irrelevance, wondered who had said that before — or something like it. Moving the earth? . . . Ah! Archimedes! It was not wholly to no practical purpose that Felix had a good literary memory, for with a chuckle he started off to find a lever.

A barrel stave had to serve. With it he pried the barrel loose, barely escaping destruction from the other seven that thundered down. Then he trundled it along the dark passageway, sweating and tugging to get it over the irregularities in the floor. To roll a three hundred pound barrel up a three-inch step took all the strength and all the endurance and all the will he could muster — which was much more than he knew he had. When he finally reached the elevator, he was so exhausted that he could hardly coax his barrel up the inch that intervened between the floor of the elevator and the floor of the cellar. Arriving at last, he found that it had taken him twenty minutes, and that he was five minutes late in starting his batch.

The rest of the day was uneventful, except that his blisters came off the next time he pulled candy, and the starch didn't seem to help that much. After he had finished the last batch, and swept up the spilt sugar from the dirty floor and put it aside in a barrel with other sweepings to be used in horehound candy, he went home. This time, after supper, he changed his clothes and went to the library, where he secured a volume of strange-looking poems which had intrigued him in previous glances at its pages. He took it home and read it in bed until he was ready to fall asleep. It was Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass."

XXII The Factory World

I

BEFORE the week was over, the raw spots on Felix's finger ends were replaced by callous skin, and pulling candy was no longer painful. He had learned his work well enough to have some leisure in which to watch the men make stick candy. He had wondered, as a child, how those red and blue flowers were "put inside" the sticks. Now the mystery was unveiled for him. . . . He saw the big candymaker form a huge stick of candy a foot in diameter and only about a foot long, in which strips of coloured candy had been arranged so as to make in cross section a six petalled flower. This short fat stick was rolled and stretched and cut in two and rolled again, until before his eyes it became a row of slender rods fifteen feet long, in which the gigantic posy had dwindled down to its intended size. These rods were scissored into candy-stick lengths, and left for an invading crowd of tired-looking frowsy girls to pack into pasteboard cartons.

Felix had leisure, too, in which to talk with the men; with the two of them at least who were so disposed — the big candymaker, who was called "Elephant," and the little one, who was called "Dutch." These two were old hands and fast friends. They were adept at solemnly sarcastic badinage, and they appreciated Felix's gifts in that direction. They had for him as a worker a tolerant and amused contempt; but they liked to hear him talk.

Felix soon found that long words and bookish phrases entertained them most of all, and it became his custom to introduce them casually into his conversation. On Satur-

day morning they informed him that it was the custom to "wet" a new pair of overalls. This, it appeared on explanation, meant that the owner of the new overalls bought everybody else a drink. "The custom," said Felix, "shall not be allowed to fall into innocuous desuetude."

They regarded this saying as a first-rate witticism, and Elephant went about repeating it. Before long the phrase became "knock-kneed steweytood," and was understood to refer to the clumsiness of the person to whom it was addressed. This transformation was assisted by Felix's mispronunciation of the word "desuetude," which he made into four syllables, accented on the first "u." His knowledge of words had been gained by eye and not by ear; hundreds of the words he used, he had never heard spoken aloud, and some of them he inevitably mispronounced.

Saturday was a short day. After a single batch in the afternoon, they devoted an hour to cleaning up. The sugar and broken fragments of candy were swept up and saved. Then hot water was poured on the floor to loosen the scurf of sticky mud, and this was scraped off with spades and hoes and mopped away. Felix's last task was to scour his copper vessels to a spotless and shining cleanliness. This was done with a rag soaked in tartaric acid. Its effect on the brown stained surfaces of the metal was miraculous. The only difficulty was that Felix's hands and arms were covered with unhealed scratches and raw burns, and in them the tartaric acid was hell-fire and poison.

Nevertheless the agony had to be endured until every inch of the copper surfaces, which seemed to be miles in extent, had been scoured. Also the acid got in his eyes, and blinded him, and in his torment he put his knuckle in his eye and rubbed more acid in, and there was nothing to be done except wait until the acid, diluted with tears, had lost its strength. Blinded and weeping, Felix lay on the freshly mopped floor under the great vacuum-pan, scouring away its last spot under the coolly appraising eye of Elephant and Dutch.

At last it was finished. "Now we'll wet them new overalls," said Dutch cheerfully.

2

The other two candymakers deigned to accompany them, and all five lined up at Elephant's favourite bar. It was the first time Felix had ever taken part in the ceremony of buying a drink. Much embarrassed, and not knowing what to say or do, he stood there with his pay envelope in his hand, while the barkeeper waited. The pause became uncomfortable. Felix shook a five dollar gold piece and two silver dollars out of his envelope and laid one of the dollars on the mahogany surface in silence.

Elephant prompted tactfully. "You say, What'll you have?"

"What will you have?" Felix repeated.

"Beer for me," said Elephant. "One of them big ones."

They all took beer, and five "big ones" were pushed out. Felix tasted his gingerly. It was bitter, and he had never liked the taste of it; but he did not want these men to know that he was unaccustomed to it, so he began to swallow it quickly. "Well, here's looking," said Elephant hastily, supplying the ceremonial phrase which Felix should have uttered, and the four glasses were tilted up.

A week had passed in Felix's career as a workingman. During that week he had been under a scrutiny closer than the momentary one of the foreman's. He had been subjected to a realistic appraisal. As a worker he did not pass muster; Elephant and Dutch could have foretold the first day how little use he was likely to be about a factory — but that was the foreman's concern, not theirs. It was chiefly as a human being that they had him up for consideration; and, as a human being, on the whole they liked him. He was rather odd; but not so odd as to be set utterly apart, laughed at behind his back, made the victim of hostile contempt, or, what is worse, shunned and ostracized.

They were tolerant of oddness; so long as the odd one was a good sport, and took or parried the thrusts of their sarcasm with ease, he was acceptable. They accepted Felix. This round of drinks at Elephant's favourite bar was in a sense his initiation into their fellowship.

Of all this, Felix was quite unconscious. Perhaps, in a blundering and painful way, he was learning the uses of the real world; but they meant nothing to him. He was in this scene but not of it. When he had dutifully finished his beer to the last drop, Elephant proposed another. But Felix conceived the event as finished, so far as he was concerned. "No thanks," he said, and hurried out. He was anxious to get his supper over and go somewhere.

3

But where? To the library? No — books would not do tonight.

To see Helen? She would be sorry about his having to go to work, and he could not bear that.

To visit old Wheels, then?

It was not precisely philosophy that he wanted. . . . But he did go to see Wheels. And after a few minutes the fat sage, looking reflectively at the discontented youth sitting on the edge of the opposite chair, said,—

"I'll tell you. Let's go to the Island and sit in the cool breeze and listen to the music and drink some beer; and maybe you can find a pretty girl to dance with you."

"Good," said Felix. "Let's!"

XXIII Adventure

I

THE Island, as they approached it on the ferry, was a golden glow of lights. Snatches of music from the dancing pavilions were wafted to them on the faint, intermittent breeze, together with the damp smell of trees. They found themselves a table in one of the pavilions at the edge of the dancing floor, and while Wheels judiciously praised the quality of the Port Royal beer he was drinking, Felix left his untasted, and watched with fierce envy the slender girls who were whirled past in the arms of young men. At last he could endure it no longer, and rose suddenly.

"Let's go somewhere else," he said.

Wheels amiably complied, but halted by one of the little tables, lighted by a string of electric lights that zigzagged among the trees, a place half way between the blaze of crowded gaiety in the pavilions and the shadows of the wood beyond in which sweethearts wandered and paused unseen.

"It is," said Wheels, "an ancient privilege of youth to seek its kind. I will not deter you longer. If I were your age, I too would go and get acquainted with one of those charming girls who are wandering, two by two, seeking for company."

"Get acquainted with them?" repeated Felix. "I only wish I knew how to go about it."

"Happily," said the fat philosopher, "that is a realm of action in which no possible method can fail. There is no wrong way to go about it — provided always that one is young, and not fat. Any way will do. The most time-honoured way is to mention the weather.— But you know

these things as well as I do; no doubt better. Only, it occurs to me that perhaps you hesitate on account of money? Well, you can have everything that this place has to offer for five dollars, and still have carfare home. Good-bye."

Felix mechanically shook the proffered hand. He did not understand what it meant until he found a crumpled bill remaining in his hand. The fat philosopher was strolling away.

2

Felix hesitated, put the bill in his pocket, and sat down. He felt uneasily under a certain obligation to fulfil his friend's expectations, to furnish him with the vicarious adventure of which he had spoken. He looked across at another table where two girls had been sitting. One was just going away on the arm of a young man who had invited her to dance. The other, a girl of his own age or a little older, slender, with beautiful, clear-cut features and a radiant mass of yellow hair, looked after them as they went into the pavilion. Then her glance idly drifted back to her table, and for an instant her eyes met his. Felix rose.

He would perhaps have been afraid to go up and speak to her, save that he had just received in so philosophic and authoritarian a form the information that he would not be rebuffed. Yet he was surprised when he found himself walking over to her. She looked up again and saw him coming. He wondered what he was going to say to her. Anything, he told himself. But suppose he could not think of anything! That seemed to be the fact. He was getting nearer and nearer to her, and still he had not thought of anything to say. He made these observations upon himself with a kind of calm amusement, as though this youth who was walking toward the girl were another person. He wondered what that youth would think of to say. Then for a moment he was the youth again, trying desperately to think. He had to say something! He remembered what Wheels had said — the words floated slowly through his

mind —" the time-honoured way is to mention the weather." He was amused at that. Was it possible that *that* shabby device would serve as an introduction to this radiant and seemingly inapproachable creature? He rejected the idea on her behalf with scorn, and then with instantaneous cynicism wondered if it were not true. . . . All this had taken but a few seconds' time, for she was only a few steps away. And suddenly he found himself before her, lifting his hat. Then his duality of consciousness vanished, and he said with an effort, " It's nice and cool out here under the trees, isn't it?"

" Yes, isn't it?" echoed the girl. He was astonished. That shabby device *had* served. Well, what should he do now?

He laughed and spoke again. " I want to dance with you," he said, and then realized that he had never danced in his life . . . except years and years ago, in the garret, with Rose. She had taught him the steps. Would he remember? " But," he added aloud, " I don't dance very well."

She smiled and rose. " That's all right," she said, putting a hand on his arm. " You've only to let yourself go with the music."

Again, as from a distance, Felix found himself looking with calm amusement at the youth who was entering the dancing pavilion with this beautiful unknown girl-creature on his arm. What was he going to do? Would he be able to dance? The band struck up a tune, and Felix, after trying to decide whether it was a waltz or a two-step, remembered what the girl had said: " You've only to let yourself go with the music." He listened, and let himself go — and discovered that he was dancing. A moment later it was, it seemed, that he discovered he was holding a girl in his arms. He was surprised. Then — it seemed to him infinitely absurd — he remembered how it had come about: " the time-honoured way is to mention the weather." No!

that was too preposterous. He glanced down at her cheek, saw the electric light broken into a golden shimmer by wisps of her hair, held her tighter, so that he felt her bosom soft against his own — and still it did not seem true.

The music stopped. "You dance beautifully," she said, and sank into a chair by one of the little tables. He remembered his five-dollar bill, and beckoned the waiter. While she hesitated, he suggested: "Benedictine?"— why, he did not know; he had never tasted it — and she nodded yes.

They laughed and chatted gaily over their benedictine; afterward he could not remember a word that either of them had said. But it was not the words, it was boy and girl, getting acquainted — words did not particularly matter. And by the time the benedictine was finished he felt well enough acquainted with her to hold her still more tightly in his arms during the next dance, and after another drink to say, "Let's walk."

Leaning on his arm, she came with him out of the blaze, through the cluster of tables, into the darkness of the great trees. The grass was damp. Making some silly jest about Sir Walter Raleigh, the spirit of which she understood, if not the historical reference, he took off his coat and spread it down for them to sit upon. He took her hand, still talking gaily, played with the fingers of it, and then casually put his arm around her. She seemed hardly conscious of his embrace, and she did not resist when he drew her to him and kissed her. He did this in a curiously detached way. It was as though he could not quite believe that all this was real. Even her kiss did not seem real, though its warmth and softness stirred his blood. He pressed his mouth more tightly to hers, and her lips opened, and she clung to him, and they both trembled. And still it did not seem to Felix as though it were actually happening.

Then suddenly she drew herself away, and they heard voices. Two men were coming past, arguing loudly. Felix

and the girl held tightly each other's hand, and sat quietly waiting until the intruders should pass. But they paused, a dozen feet away.

3

"Nonsense!" one of the voices boomed. "If that is all you know about Socialism, you have yet much to learn. Municipal ownership, you say! I concede you, street cars are something. But they are not Socialism. Nor are old age pensions Socialism. They have them in Germany, from which I came. I tell you what you think you want here smells to me too much like that state of affairs which I gladly left behind. There is too much of government, too much of the all-powerful State, in your ideal. I quarrel even with your phrase, 'Co-operative commonwealth.' I do not speak of commonwealths — I speak of freedom, of happiness, of a world altogether new and beautiful. . . ."

They had moved on, and the other man was replying in indistinct tones. Felix became conscious that his hold on the girl's hand had relaxed. She laughed. "What business have they got here?" she demanded. "People can argue just as well in the light!" There seemed to Felix something metallic in her voice.

Presently she said, "I don't even know your name — and you haven't asked mine." They exchanged that information. Her name was Daisy Fisher. It struck him that Daisy was not the nicest name for so pretty a girl. He looked at her again, wishing to recover his impressions of her beauty, and he was annoyed at the darkness which made her face a blur. He discovered that she had taken her hand away. He made no effort to recover it.

"It interested me, what they were saying," he told her.

"Oh — are you a Socialist?"

"No — not exactly. I don't know."

"I'm a Republican," she said.

"Why?" he asked gravely.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "My father was."

"Hmph!" said Felix.

"Well," said the girl, "it doesn't make any difference, anyway — I don't have to vote."

"And you don't want to?"

"Not particularly." Her hand stole into his again. He pressed it. He remembered that he had been intending to make violent love to her just before those men came along; now he did not want to. And she? He wished they were back in the light. He wondered if she were really as beautiful as he had thought. Her hand still lay in his. He pressed it again. She returned the pressure softly. With an effort, as if performing a duty, he put his arm around her, and drew her toward him. This time she resisted. "No, you mustn't," she said reproachfully. He dropped his arm.

XXIV Utopia

I

THERE was a silence, in which Felix was torn between a desire to recover his mastery of the situation and a desire to be out of it altogether. Then the girl said, "Let's go back and dance."

"All right," said Felix, and jumped up. They came back blinking into the light. Felix stole a glance at her. She *was* beautiful. . . .

"Oh!" cried the girl suddenly, seizing Felix's arm, and dragging him through the crowd. "There's some people I know. Ben! Ben!"

Felix came along unwillingly. He felt that he did not want to know this Ben. Still less, if possible, did he want to know the Dick and Tillie and Grace and Harry and Ethel who composed Ben's party. Not that there seemed to be any reason why he should not want to know them. The girls were young and pretty and in the best of spirits, the boys a jolly trio. But Felix suddenly became taciturn. It was all the more curious, for in a wondering flash of memory he recalled that while sitting with Daisy at the little table after their first dance he had had dozens of amusing little things to say. She remembered it too, for she laughed and said to him, "What's the matter, Felix? Cat got your tongue?"

And a little later, when his silence still persisted, she turned to him under cover of the general hilarity and said: "I know how you feel, Felix. A crowd of new people always bother me at first. But you've just got to join in — it's all right if you try."

"She presumes to encourage me," he thought haughtily, and was more morose than ever.

A moment later his wandering eye caught a glimpse of two figures who seemed somehow familiar, and then the voice booming out made it certain; yes, they were the men who had passed among the trees. The one who had been talking — who was, indeed, still talking, in a decisive manner and in a loud voice, which Felix could hear even at this distance, was a big broad-shouldered man of erect carriage and florid face, with bristling moustache. It was only at second glance that he seemed rather stout. He raised his hand and shook his finger in the face of his companion, the little man, who nodded respectfully.

"Excuse me," said Felix to Daisy. "There's a man over here I want to speak to."

He followed the big man and his little companion, and soon overtook them.

"You're a Socialist, aren't you?" he demanded, blocking the big man's path.

"Well, what of it?" asked the other genially.

"I — I want to join," said Felix.

The big man laughed. "Well, here's the secretary of the local," he said, indicating his companion.

"My name," said the little man, "is Rapp. This is Comrade Vogelsang."

Felix told them his name, and they shook hands with him, addressing him as Comrade. "Are you transferring from some other local, or are you a new recruit?" asked Comrade Rapp.

"I am joining for the first time," said Felix.

"Then you'll have to sign an application," said Comrade Rapp, and took out a card, on which Felix wrote his name. Both his new friends signed theirs underneath, recommending him to membership. "This will be acted upon at the meeting next Friday," said Comrade Rapp. "You can come then, and pay your dues,"— for Felix was reaching into his pocket.

But the remains of the fat philosopher's five dollar bill demanded to be spent at once. "I'll tell you," said Felix, "let me pay a year in advance! I have the money now, and I may not have it again." It was as though he had a grudge against the money and had to get rid of it.

Comrade Vogelsang looked at him with a sudden curiosity. "Do I not see you before?" he cried. "Yes!"—Then he checked himself, and laughed. "My friend here, he cannot think and look at the same time. But I can!" He laughed again. "Comrade Rapp," he said, "will think I am no friend of the co-operative commonwealth; but I say, do not rob yourself tonight. Keep your money." But Felix shook his head and again offered the bills to the secretary. "No? What is it, then?" asked Comrade Vogelsang. "Something too deep for me, evidently! Well," he turned to his companion, "take his money. It will do him no good at the present. He too thinks that Socialism is composed of municipal street car wheels. No? Or some other foolishness which I shall have to knock out of his head. Take his money."

So Felix paid over three dollars, and received twelve little dues-stamps. "Here," said Comrade Rapp, "is a card which tells where and when we meet. If you should lose it, go to Turner Hall next Friday — the last hall on the top floor."

"You will come with us and drink some beer?" asked Comrade Vogelsang. "No? Well, then, I shall have an account of you next Friday. See well how you behave in the meantime!" He laughed his hearty laugh, and Felix went slowly back to find the girl he had left. So Comrade Vogelsang had seen him with her! . . . He hurried on, with a sudden fear that she would be gone.

He found her with Ben and Tillie. The rest had gone off to dance. "I'm so glad you've come," she cried. "Ben here makes me tired with his silly jokes. Shall we dance?"

2

Yes, she was very beautiful. And her voice — why had he imagined a while ago that it was unpleasant? It had a silvery sweetness. He took her arm, and pressed it as they went to the pavilion. It was an awed and shy caress, and he was full of a sense of undeserved privilege in having her company. But when he did it the second time, she drew herself away and gave him a reproving glance. He felt that he had been overbold, and flushed with shame. He commenced to wonder if he would be able to dance this time. "What is this?" he asked, hesitating at the edge of the open space.

"Just a two-step," she said, and held out her arms. "Come on."

But he could not get the rhythm. He made two attempts, and stopped to begin again. She was impatient. The third time he persisted, and stumbled over her feet. "I'm sorry," he said, over and over. He was utterly unhappy. He couldn't dance, that was all there was to it. How he had managed it before he didn't know.

She turned to him, annoyed. "I just don't believe you want to!" she said.

"I want to too much, that's the trouble," he muttered.

"Well," she relented, with a smile, "come, let's try it again. You did so beautifully the last time."

"No, please!" he protested. "I'm afraid I can't." So they sat down at a table; but he was too covered with humiliation to talk. It was a relief when Ben and the others joined them again. Felix bought drinks for everybody, and had a dismal conviction that it would take more money than he had left. He was wrong, but he suffered in foretaste all the shame of that event; and he realized afterward that in his embarrassment he had neglected to tip the waiter. He wondered if everybody had noticed, and concluded that they had.

"I must go home," said Daisy at last. He rose hesitat-

ingly, to accompany her. "Don't come if you don't want to," she flashed. He was angry with her for that. The ferry ride was not cheerful.

"What *is* Socialism?" she asked challengingly on the street car.

"A lot of things," he replied sulkily.

"Meaning that it's not worth while to tell me?"

"I mean — I don't know exactly. You heard what that man said — 'beauty and happiness.'"

"Yes — a long time after I'm dead. I thought it was something like that."

Somewhere in the back of his mind Felix thought: "She is right. She wants her happiness now. Why don't I? It's so easy to fall in love. I'm more than half in love with her now. And she with me. That's why we're quarreling. We want each other. Well, why don't we take each other? That is what is called happiness. . . . She's terribly sweet. And she has pride. If only her name weren't Daisy!"

Daisy lived in Stevenson — far out. "I do like her," Felix kept saying to himself. "And she likes me."

They left the street car and walked. When they reached the house, she hesitated, and then said: "I go in the back way. This isn't my home, you know. I work here." There was something between defiance and appeal in her voice.

"I work in a factory," he heard himself saying.

At the door, after she had found her key, she held out her hand. He took it in both of his.

"Am I going to see you again?" she asked. There was a hard note in her voice.

Felix pondered. "I haven't a telephone," he said.

"Do you want my number?"

"Yes." He wrote it down.

"I'm free on Wednesday and Saturday evening," she said, "and every other Saturday afternoon." He put that down, too. Was he, he asked himself in curious surprise,

a snob? — he, a factory hand himself? — he, who had been in love with a girl who worked in a factory? It was preposterous, but as he wrote down her "free evenings" he realized that he would never see her again.

"Good-bye," she said softly.

He took her in his arms and kissed her upturned lips. They were sweet and chill.

"Good-bye!" he said, and went away.

On the street car he found that he had only four cents left. He got off and walked home. "Wheels was wrong," he said to himself amusedly. "One *can't* get everything the Island has to offer and still have carfare home!"

XXV Central Branch

I

THE final flight of stairs leading to the little meeting place up under the eaves of Turner Hall had a dusty banister, as though the existence of the place had been forgotten even by the janitor; but to Felix the dust that came off on his fingers as he breathlessly climbed, brought back a memory of the attic at Maple where he had found Percy's Reliques and the Book of Mormon; and with that flash of memory came the sense that in leaving the last stair-landing he had left behind the actualities of Turner Hall and of Port Royal, and reached a place out of the world.

The door of the room was open to let through the breeze that came faintly in at the open windows; and Felix, pausing for breath, looked in at a little room around the edges of which, in a straggling row of chairs, some of them tilted against the wall, sat a dozen men in their shirt-sleeves. A confused murmur of quiet talk drifted into the hallway, with the smell of pipes and cigar-smoke.

Felix stood still, under the spell of a curious illusion. It was as if he knew this place — had always known it — as though he had frequented it in some previous existence, or in dreams. He knew that he belonged there; and he breathed in the odour of tobacco smoke and drank up the murmur of voices from within with a kind of nostalgia. After a long exile in an alien environment, he was coming home.

He entered, and took a seat a little apart from the others. Rapp, the man to whom he had paid his dues the other day on the Island, was seated at a long table in the middle of

the room, earnestly discussing something in low tones with another man. Some of the others turned and looked at Felix, and he smiled back confidently. Rapp beckoned a third man to him, and the three were still talking when some one entered quietly, and the conversation stopped, as if the meeting were about to begin. And the meeting did in fact begin, after some perfunctory formalities, with the reading of the minutes.

It was in the midst of these that Comrade Vogelsang entered. His glance swept the room, looking for Felix, found him and dwelt on him for a moment in mingled surprise and approval, and then passed on to the vacant chair a little beyond, whither Comrade Vogelsang marched and sat himself down. The drone of the minutes continued.

"The next order of business," said the soft voice of the mild chairman, "is the reading of correspondence."

Comrade Rapp rose again, shuffling a sheaf of letters. "From the National Executive Committee," he began.

Comrade Vogelsang had taken out a cigar and lighted it. He was looking at Felix, with a quizzical stare, up and down and through. Felix was not disconcerted. He was too immersed in the sense of exhilaration which the meeting of itself gave to him. Somehow he felt, as he had never felt before in any group, that these were his own kind of people, that he understood them, that he was on an equality with them. The letters Comrade Rapp was reading, meaningless in detail, had a sharp significance as tokens of the relation of this group to other groups of the same kind, proofs of the existence of a vast body of people among whom he felt that he belonged. He was happy.

"Admission of new members." The secretary rose, and read off the names on four cards, rapidly, and added, "I move that these applicants be admitted to membership." Somebody murmured a second to the motion, and it was put to a hasty, perfunctory vote. But Felix thrilled with pleasure. He was a member of Local Port Royal of the Socialist Party!

"Unfinished business. Is there any unfinished business?" It seemed that there was none. "New business."

2

The Socialist "local" in Port Royal — or rather, the Central branch of the local, comprising all the English-speaking membership of the party — was at that time in the quietest stage in its career. There had always been Socialists in Port Royal — not few enough to make them oddities, and not so many as to have any effect upon the practical politics of the town. Some of them had passed through the schism which had given birth to their parent organization; but the thunderings of DeLeon were now forgotten — and the controversies over the I. W. W. and "direct action" were still of the future. Central branch of Local Port Royal lay in the trough of the wave of events; putting up candidates for elections, holding street meetings in earnest competition with the Salvation Army and the sellers of patent medicines, collecting dues, and holding its regular meetings in Turner Hall twice a month. The membership changed with the steady, eternal migrations of labour; old members lost interest and only came around every few months to pay up their back dues. The meetings in Turner Hall were occupied with official proceedings, long drawn out and unexciting, and the conduct of affairs was left to a faithful handful who could be persuaded to give their time to it. The branch was like a small, unpopular, semi-respectable heretical church which continued to exist because it is in the nature of institutions, once started, to keep on existing.

But there were members who were impatient of the monotony of these proceedings, and who now and then made brief, ineffectual attempts to enliven them; ineffectual, because they were somehow quickly and softly smothered by the mild but efficient chairman. One of these was Comrade Vogelsang, who now abruptly rose to speak. The subject under discussion was a program committee, from which the

last remaining member had just resigned; one of the other members having been suspended for non-payment of dues, while the third had left town. Some one had remarked, "The program committee never does any work anyway, it might as well be abolished!"

It was at this point that Comrade Vogelsang took the floor. "Comrade Chairman," he said, "I move that Comrade Fay be elected to the program committee." And before Felix quite realized what was happening, the vote had carried. But Comrade Vogelsang still held the floor.

"I move further, Comrade Chairman, that Comrade Ross be elected to the committee." There was a little surprise at this motion, but it also was carried unanimously. Comrade Vogelsang still remained standing.

"I consider the program committee," he said, "one of the most important parts of our organization. I think we have made the best possible choice of its first two members; it remains only for us to be equally judicious in selecting the third." He paused and smiled. "Modesty forbids—"

Felix had already some glimmering of what his friend was going to say, and so at this moment he rose. "I move that Comrade Vogelsang be elected as the third member of the committee," he said.

There was a ripple of amusement, interrupted by the soft voice of the chairman. "Is there a second? All those in favour—" And the incident was finished off in the usual manner.

"Any further business before this meeting—?"

"A motion to adjourn will—"

The members commenced to rise, but the chairman went through the formality of a vote. . . . A small stocky man, apparently a Jew, was approaching Felix, with one hand patting smooth over his forehead the shiny locks of a black wig, and the other fumbling at a watch-charm on his stomach, grinning ferociously the while. "You are the new member? Fay is your name?" he asked. "My name is Feinbaum. Here is my card. I have a little tailor shop

not far from here. Come and see me. I would like to talk with you."

Another man came up. "Comrade Fay, how do you do? My name is Peck. Here is a little pamphlet that may interest you." Felix stuffed it in his pocket.

Comrade Vogelsang took him by the shoulder. "Come with me," he said.

3

They walked off together. "Did Peck give you one of his pamphlets?" Comrade Vogelsang asked, and laughed. "Peck is a spookist. A spiritualist. He will want you to go to seances with him. Pay him no attention."

They hurried down the stairs through the stream of men descending from a score of lodge-halls and union meetings. "But Feinbaum you should go and see. He is an amusing cuss. He has things in his head which he calls ideas. It is worth while to listen to them rattle." Again he took Felix by the arm and steered him across the street, into the back room of a saloon. When they were seated at a table he said, "It makes me hungry to listen to so much foolishness. I must eat. And you also. Yes?—Waiter! Some black bread and Swiss cheese and a little Bologna sausage. And two seidels of dark beer. . . ." He lighted another cigar.

"And now yourself. Yes, we will talk about *you*. Generally I talk about myself. It is the most interesting subject I know. But first you. Your history. No, I do not mean that you should tell me. *I* will tell *you!* That is better, eh? You will learn about yourself. I will tell you who you are, and what you want to do. How could *you* tell me that? You do not know it! But I know it, and I will tell you. All about it. . . . But first we will eat. Ah, here is our waiter. Yes, it makes one hungry, and thirsty, too, to listen to foolishness. Prosit!"

XXVI Revelation

FELIX felt a strange confidence in this smiling red-faced man with dictatorial manners who sat opposite him, and he waited, with an emotion he had never felt before, for him to speak. It was as if he had been lost for a long time, not daring to ask anybody the right road, and now had found a true guide. But he was startled when Comrade Vogelsang looked up, wiped his mouth, and said, "You write poetry?"

"Yes — but how did you know?" demanded Felix.

"I know. All young men of your type do. You doubtless regard yourself as an isolated phenomenon — a unique person. It is not so. The same conditions produce the same results in persons of your temperament."

"Poets are made, then, not born?"

"I did not say you were a poet. I only said that you wrote poetry. No — I do not think you are a poet. But I can soon tell. You have some of your poems with you — all young men who write poetry carry it around with them. Come, out with it!"

Laughing, Felix produced a bundle of folded papers from his pocket.

"I will see." And Comrade Vogelsang took the bundle. He opened the first sheet and read it through. Then he looked up at Felix quizzically, and read the beginning:

"The dust whereof my body came
Was ashes of an ancient flame,
And rearisen ghosts of fire
In me cry out with vain desire."

"Well?" asked Felix.

"One wouldn't think it to look at you," said Comrade

Vogelsang, smiling. "I see nothing the matter with you. You seem to me capable of being quite a fire yourself, instead of a mere habitation for complaining ghosts. Why should they cry out with vain desire? Is your opportunity for life more meagre than that of your ancestors? Or is it that you think that nothing is worth while doing? . . . I continue." And he read the next stanza:

"Among these men of colder clay
I wake by night or walk by day,
And lift or lay my weary head
Unfriended and uncomforted."

"Well?" asked Felix again.

"Old maids' poetry," said Comrade Vogelsang, making a wry face. "Not real poetry. To be a poet you must be able to speak for yourself. This isn't you. This is some sick person."

"Then," said Felix, "you think I am not a real poet?"

"Let me see some more." He read three of the folded papers without comment. When he had finished he looked up smiling, and said, "No — I don't think you are a poet. And what is more, I think you are getting tired of pretending to be one."

"What do you mean?" asked Felix.

"That is why," pursued Comrade Vogelsang, "you have come to me — to be told the truth. You have been mooning about, writing verses about life, instead of living. You have been afraid to live. Most people are. Something stands between them and life. Not only economic conditions: something else — a shadow, a fear. Perhaps it is safer not to try, they think. So do you. These poems are your consolations for not living. That is why I called you an old maids' poet. If this young man is content with nothing, why shouldn't I be? That is what they think when they read your poems. That is why they like your poems. You have a future — a great future — as a consoler of weak souls. If you just go ahead, you will become famous. But

I don't think you will. I don't think you want to be a —"

"'A pet lamb is a sentimental farce,'" quoted Felix. "No, by God, I believe you're right! Go on!"

"These," said Comrade Vogelsang, laying a detaining hand on the pile of papers which Felix was about to restore to his pocket, "I am not yet through with. If they are not real poems, they are records of your fears — of what stands between you and life. You will not be ready to live until you have learned much — and unlearned much more. You must have a new philosophy, new morals, a new mind with which to face the world. We will speak of these poems again. But first I must tell you some more about yourself. — Waiter! Two more seidels of beer!"

XXVII Adopted

I

TO be told about oneself for the first time is a rather staggering experience, and Felix went home from his session with Comrade Vogelsang dazed as well as illuminated.

It was the first time that Felix had come into contact with the representative of a culture alien to that of his own land. This man was scornful of what he called "bourgeois" culture. When Felix realized that he was being accused of sharing this bourgeois stuff-and-nonsense, he had at first indignantly denied the fact. But Comrade Vogelsang had laughed at him. "I know," he said. "You have revolted against the gross facts of American economic life. You do not like them. And you have proceeded to blind your eyes with ideals. You think you have done something original. But you have only taken great pains to do for yourself what the American bourgeoisie stands ready and eager to do for you. The American bourgeoisie pays millions of dollars a year to support colleges to teach young people like you to believe in ideals — and to stop looking at economic facts. You tell me that you will have to keep on working — that you cannot afford to go back to school. You are wrong. Do not think for a moment that the American bourgeoisie wants you to work in its factories. No — you might get tired of your ideals, and see what is going on in those factories. You think that the master-class is indifferent to your fate, that it will let you slave your life away among machines. No — it is too kind — that is to say, too wise — to let you do that. Once let it hear of your predicament, and it will come to your rescue — if you let it.

You do not believe that? Then let me tell you I know a man in this city to whom I could go — I myself — and tell him about you, and he would pay your way through one of the great colleges. You want to be a poet? Very well; lift your hand, and it is done. Say the word, and you shall spend the rest of your life writing pretty verses about yourself, like those you have shown me. No, you do not know the world you live in."

After nothing but praise, and the most judiciously tempered criticism, this reiterated damnation of his "pretty verses" was curiously agreeable to Felix. He wished to hear more of it, so he defended his poems as best he could. Had he not told the truth in them?

"Yes, but what truth? There are truths and truths! New truths and old! What have you said that has not been said by dozens of poets before you, and much better? I do not blame you. You are the victim of what you have read. I do not say you copy what others have written. I only say that you have discovered in yourself only what other poets have revealed to you in yourself. . . . Have you ever read Dostoievsky? No, I thought not. When you do, you will see that you have only scratched the surface of your soul with your pen-point. You will realize that you have caverns and abysses in yourself. You will explore them — when you have been taught that they are there. Have you ever read Ibsen? . . . My God, and this is American culture! Do not think I blame you. But you have spent the first part of your life accumulating a skull-full of trash, the debris of stale culture, and you must hurry up and unlearn it. You have no time to lose, if you expect to say anything that is worth listening to. It is lucky for you that I have come across you. . . ."

So Felix thought. Awed and bewildered, he exposed his ideas, his emotions, to the dissection of, as it seemed to him, a surgeon of the mind. "Do you think I shall amount to anything?" he asked.

The other considered. "Yes," he said, "or I shall be

much ashamed of myself. You think I am egotistic? Well, you are right. But I have good material to work upon in you. Underneath all the softness of your mind there is something hard."

Felix returned to the question of the proper destiny of a poet. Was it not his fate to suffer pain . . . ?

"Again I tell you, your head is full of romantic nonsense. Stop thinking of the middle ages. You are living now. You have a relation to your own time, which does not consist in lying down for it to walk over you."

"But what *am* I to do?"

"Open your eyes. I cannot tell you all at once. There are many things you can do when you come to a realization of yourself. Do not ask me questions as if I were a fortune teller. But I will tell you this. If before many months you have not found out what to do for yourself I will think myself no teacher. Listen once more. I have been trying to get it into your head that you are a member of what is called in Europe the intellectual proletariat. If I can get you to understand what that means, you can work out the implications of it for yourself. Perhaps I am mistaken. Perhaps you are just a romantic proletarian, and will go on working in a factory and writing bad verses; perhaps you are not a real proletarian at all, but the offspring of a broken-down middle-class family, in which case you will go back where you belong. That is more likely. But I have hopes of you."

"Do you mean that I should work for Socialism?"

"More romantic nonsense! No, no self-sacrifice, no martyrdom. Socialism does not need your help. On the contrary, it will help you. I see you do not understand me. We are going too fast. But you will. Be patient. Finish your beer."

No, Felix did not understand. But he read the only novel of Dostoievsky's he could find, and all the plays of Ibsen, in the next fortnight. He read also some plays by a man he had never heard of, Bernard Shaw; and these

seemed to make Comrade Vogelsang more intelligible. They were like him, in a way. They both upset his accustomed ideals, and left him uncertain what to put in their place. And they both made him wonder if they always really meant what they said; because if what they said were so, then . . . ?

It gave him a little shock, on Saturday afternoon, to see this wise man going placidly along the street in a mail-carrier's uniform. He had vaguely heard that Comrade Vogelsang worked in the postoffice; but his uniform, his mail-bag, seemed queer. He saluted Felix casually and walked on, sorting a handful of letters. He seemed to be another person.

2

Felix read the pamphlet Comrade Peck had given him; and he would have been bewildered by its credulous silliness — it was about table-turning and "spirit-photography" — if he had not remembered what Comrade Vogelsang had said: "Any movement which promises to change conditions will always attract, first of all, the freaks, the cranks, the unbalanced persons — all those whose psychic weaknesses make it hard for them to get along in the world as it is. We used to have more of them in our branch — before I began making speeches at them." He laughed. "Yes, I drove away some of our craziest members. But we have a few of them left." This candour startled Felix, who would instinctively have preferred to idealize the membership of the party; it seemed to him almost like disloyalty. "Come," his mentor had said, "don't be shocked. It is not your business to imagine pretty things that are not true; it is your business to see things as they are. And you will have fine opportunities for the study of human nature in our meetings."

In this mood, somewhat upon his guard, he went to see Feinbaum. The little tailor welcomed him eagerly, grinning his ferocious smile, and led him into the back room, where

some girls were sewing garments. "You see my shop!" he said. "Perhaps you are surprised that I do not have men working for me. It is because I can get these girls to work for less. Is it not so, Becky?"

The little dark girl who was addressed looked up. "Dead right!" she said, and bent again over her work.

"It is the capitalist system," said Feinbaum, patting smooth his shiny black wig. "Under capitalism, do as the capitalists do. If I did not have these girls working for me, I would be working myself for some other man. As it is, I have time for intellectual conversation with people like you. Sit down!" He cleared off a chair.

"What shall we discuss? Morality? I like to discuss morality. It shocks my young ladies here, but they pretend not to mind. A wage-slave cannot afford to have fine feelings. They think I am a terribly immoral person. And so I am!" He grinned.

Decidedly, Feinbaum was amusing. . . .

On Sunday evening a meeting of the program committee was held in the little flat inhabited by Comrade Vogelsang. There was a Mrs. Vogelsang, a kindly but realistic woman whose attitude toward her husband helped to temper Felix's growing admiration for the wisdom of his new friend. "Franz," she would say sharply, at the top of his most eloquent flight of discourse, "you are talking nonsense yourself!" And he would look bewildered, and collapse like a pricked balloon, and then laugh at himself. "No doubt I was," he would admit. "But it is a new kind of nonsense to Felix here and much superior to the kinds of nonsense to which he is accustomed."

When Felix arrived, there was a good-looking schoolgirl of eighteen there, a buoyant young person with red cheeks and a steady blue gaze. She was introduced as "Miss Ross — Comrade Ross"— and Felix realized that she was the other member of the committee.

"Our business," she said briskly, "is to put some life into those meetings. They are dead. And the first thing

to do to liven them up is to get the women to come. And the way to do that is to prohibit smoking, and to serve some ice cream and coffee, or something. You, Franz, will have to go without your cigar for three hours!"

"I consent," said Franz.

"And yet," said his wife, "he says he does not believe in self-sacrifice."

"I consent on one condition," said Franz. "A fair trade is no sacrifice. My condition is that you let me, and Feinbaum, and all the other crazy ones, get up and say all the shocking things we want to. That is the other thing that is necessary to liven things up."

"If we can just pry pussyfoot Simpson loose from the chairmanship —" said Emily.

"I know how to do that," suggested Felix. "Propose Emily as chairman! He will be too chivalrous to object."

"A — what-do-you-call-it? — a statesmanlike proposal," said Franz. "How would you like being chairman, Emily?"

"I would love it! And I'll let all the freaks talk all they want to. What is it you want to talk about, Franz, that's so shocking?"

"Sex."

"Pooh — sex!" said Emily. "There's nothing shocking about sex."

"Shocking to the bourgeois mind, my child."

"That's just because you have a bourgeois mind yourself! Not that I object to being bourgeois! What could be more delightfully bourgeois than this, Papa Franz?" She swept her arm about in a gesture that included them all. "And here's Mamma Vogelsang with tea and sandwiches." She helped herself. "Food's very bourgeois, don't you think, Felix?"

Felix smiled at the hit. It was true, the atmosphere of the comfortable Vogelsang flat was not proletarian, nor aristocratic, nor bohemian — it was bourgeois, just that. And Papa and Mamma Vogelsang, beaming upon their

adopted children with the most benevolently parental airs, and themselves, the affectionate and disrespectful children, composed a picture of respectable domestic felicity!

They commenced to talk about going on a little picnic, all by themselves, next Sunday. . . . Felix hated picnics. He had unwillingly been dragged to more than one of them, but he loathed them, and he had sworn he would never go on another. . . . But he forgot this, and entered gaily into the plans. . . .

Papa and Mamma Vogelsang, Emily and himself — they seemed to Felix the nicest family in all the world. . . .

XXVIII Discoveries

I

THE plans of the program committee were wildly successful. Pussyfoot Simpson was gently deposed in favour of Comrade Emily, who found a way of expediting what was called "business" until it occupied but the smallest portion of a meeting. And the rest of the time she used with the assistance of her fellow committeemen, in staging a kind of intellectual melodrama. The spirit of earnest dulness which had hung so heavy over the little hall was banished, and in its place ruled the wilful and capricious impulses of intellectual curiosity, the passions of affirmation and denial, and the utter intoxication of talk. A new period in the history of Central Branch had begun.

Everybody made speeches on the slightest provocation; and with the presence of women — easily allured, as Emily had foretold, by food and fresh air — with the presence of this audience, seldom taking part in the discussions, but always a part of them, a change began to take place in the quality of the debates. It was partly that they began to be conducted in ordinary English, instead of the technical jargon of the sect; and partly that nobody, however earnest, dared to be dull. Lightness and brightness began to appear.

In all of the discussions, Franz and Felix took leading parts, with Feinbaum following along, a somewhat heavy but occasionally very amusing third, while Emily from the chair constantly interjected the most telling comment and badinage. The old members began to return, and the new members came regularly. It was the plan of the committee to get every member of the local in turn to make a speech on his favorite subject, whatever it was — Ireland, the money question, spiritualism, or free love — and follow it

with a general discussion. They had turned the meetings into a forum, and everybody, except perhaps poor old pussy-foot Simpson, was delighted.

Franz, Emily and Felix were together constantly at the Vogelsang house, and the meetings in Turner Hall were in reality the efflorescence of the discussions begun among themselves. They congratulated themselves upon their success, and aspired to more power; and at the next election, early in the fall, they rearranged the offices to suit themselves, electing the whole ticket which they had privately picked. They had not chosen to occupy any offices themselves, but nevertheless they were recognized to be the power behind those officers, who asked them what to do and did it. They called themselves the Triumvirate, and commenced to discuss whom they would send as delegates to the state convention, and who should be their choice to "run for Congress." Though the Socialist candidate had no chance of winning, it was nevertheless an honour to be chosen for that hopeless race. Simpson had been the congressional candidate for the last seven years, and doubtless expected to be candidate for the next seven years to come. The Triumvirate thought differently.

Their plans were swiftly made, and no less swiftly executed. "Fred Hutter used to be one of the best men we had," mused Franz. "Two years ago he moved to Farrington. He was secretary of the Structural Iron Workers' Union here. I hear he's been elected President of the union in Farrington. And he's as radical as they make 'em. He would be a good man to nominate. Simpson never saw the inside of a union hall in his life; and he's nothing but a reformer, anyway. Here we get them coming and going. All the real reds, and a good many union men, will vote for Hutter. Farrington has a big local, and they will send a strong delegation to the state convention. Port Royal usually has the privilege of naming the congressional candidate, because we have the biggest vote. But if *we* — if *our* delegation — puts up Hutter, he will go with a rush. It only

remains to see that we send the right delegation to the convention." He took a long puff at his cigar.

"Does modesty forbid — ?" suggested Felix.

"I was just thinking that we would make the best delegation. You and Emily and me; and two others — we always send five. Simpson, of course, will be sent. And the other?" He frowned. "If a word of this leaks out, Simpson will set the local by the ears, and get his own delegation. We must have some one we can trust. Which in this case means some one who will obey orders. I suggest," he smiled satirically, "J. Eames Sergeant."

Emily and Felix were startled. J. Eames Sergeant was a new member who had entranced them by his oratorical abilities on the occasion of his first appearance in the local, but whom subsequently Franz, and gradually the other two members of the triumvirate, had discovered to be a fool.

"He will make the nominating speech," said Franz, "and carry the convention. We will tell him what to say, and he will say it — beautifully. He will impress everybody as much as he impressed us that first time we heard him. Is it all agreed?"

2

The Vogelsang slate was sprung on the next meeting, and its members unanimously elected, Franz himself being the one to nominate Simpson first of all. It was Felix's first glimpse into practical politics, and it amused him vastly.

With no faintest notion of what was about to happen to him at the hands of his comrades, Simpson vivaciously accompanied them on the night journey to the state capital. The convention was held on Sunday, so that workingmen could attend without losing a day's work. The delegation sat in day coaches, tired and sleepy, and hopeful of getting at least a nap during the night; but Simpson, more jocund than they had ever seen him before, kept them awake with his soft prattle. To Felix, who had been working hard all week and sitting up late at night planning, this theft of his

repose furnished an emotional incentive for the *coup* which he was to assist in springing upon his companion.

In spite of lack of sleep, Felix made an engaging five-minute speech early in the convention proceedings, which resulted in his election to the platform committee, and he had the pleasure of revising the style and improving the punctuation of the document already prepared by the comrade who had written the state platforms for the last fifteen years. The respect with which his suggestions were listened to, and the alacrity with which they were adopted, were such a soothing tribute to his ego that he began to love all his fellow-men, including poor Simpson, and would fain have relented at the fatal meeting of the delegation at which the other was to meet his debacle. But he dared not go back on their plans, and when Emily, according to schedule, rose to make her carefully prepared little speech, he was ready with his second.

Simpson had expected that the meeting would be a mere formality, and that his name would be presented with the backing of the Port Royal delegation. He listened with amazement while Emily recited the merits of Comrade Hutter of Farrington; but his chivalrous respect for the feminine sex prevented him — as they had expected — from rising in his wrath to destroy her when she moved that Port Royal present Comrade Hutter's name. Everybody looked at him, even Felix, and seemed to wait for him to speak. And then, an instant before he could recover, Felix rose and seconded the motion. Comrade J. Eames Sergeant, whom Franz had taken aside just before the meeting, called for a vote. And Franz put the question. It was carried. "Shall we make it unanimous?" inquired Franz blithely, looking at Simpson, who had remained silent. Simpson recovered from his lethargy, and rose. "No!" he screamed. "This is treachery! You have betrayed me! Scoundrels! Villains! Cowards!" and rushed forth to pour into incredulous ears the story of their infamy.

In spite of his efforts to spread the story, all that most

of the delegates knew an hour later when the convention reassembled to nominate a candidate, was that Local Port Royal had proposed Comrade Hutter of Farrington. Comrade Vogelsang, a figure well known to them from previous conventions, made the nomination. Local Farrington, surprised and delighted, seconded it. Comrade J. Eames Sergeant made an eloquent speech. And Comrade Hutter, as Socialist candidate for Congress, "went with a rush," as Franz had predicted. . . . Simpson took the train home before the convention was over, and resigned at the next meeting of Central Branch, after making a speech predicting dire ruin to an organization dominated by "that gang of immoral cut-throats."

3

Central Branch was completely bewildered by this sudden explosion. They did not understand it. And on the whole — though they liked Hutter well enough, and would have been just as well pleased if he had won over Simpson in the ordinary fashion at the convention — they did not approve these underground proceedings. Franz rose to answer their unspoken criticism, and pointed out that Port Royal's delegation had been uninstructed. The delegation had used its own judgment; and its choice had been enthusiastically approved by the convention. He won an intellectual victory — but their emotions were against him. They felt that something had been "put over" on them.

Felix was now receiving his second lesson in practical politics. He shared, and felt, the blame which the branch broodingly cast upon the authors of the Simpson plot. He knew that they held his friend Franz responsible, and that they blamed themselves for electing such new and untested members as himself and Emily and Sergeant to positions of trust. They had been proud of him and Emily, as brilliant youngsters; now they regarded them as irresponsible children. So they had regarded J. Eames Sergeant as a

great orator; and now they all knew him for a fool. Felix hated the atmosphere of suspicion and silent reluctant hostility in which they were all enveloped. But Franz laughed. "That is democracy," he said. "Democracy is the same everywhere — among Socialists as well as among everybody else. How do you suppose Simpson got his power? By doing the same thing we did — seven years ago. I know. Now it is forgotten — and so will our devilish practices be forgotten — in seven weeks. The thing to do is to sit tight. We have the power. If there were any one in the branch smarter than us we would lose it. But until that happens, *we* are Central Branch. Do not worry. And I suggest that this is a good time for you to read one of your essays on evolution. We need to remind them that we have the brains."

In spite of its ruthlessness, this attitude of Franz's pleased Felix by its spiritual robustness. No, Franz did not deceive himself. He knew how to deal with people, that was all.

4

Felix was seeing a great deal of Emily at Franz's home. She, too, was robust. She did not worry about the Simpson affair, though she did not have, outspokenly at least, any such scorn as Franz for the "injured ideals" of the branch. She laughed at Franz's explanations, saying, "Why do you pretend that we have really done something Machiavellian and diabolic, Papa Franz? I have been president of a high school sorority, and all this is an old story to me. Why, what we did makes your poor little plot pale into insignificance! But you like to think you are wicked, don't you?"

She was so agreeable and companionable and sensible and sweet and merry and wise and pretty, so capable of good talk and quiet listening, so full of the charm of healthy girlhood, that Felix wondered why he did not fall in love with her. Sometimes, so indispensable had her companship become, so eagerly did he look forward to meeting her, that he fancied he was in love with her. But he had only to

remember his emotions in the factory at Vickley, in the presence of Margaret, to realize that this, whatever else it might be, was not love. . . . They talked a great deal about love at Franz's. Once or twice, after Felix and Emily had gone, Mrs. Vogelsang reproved her husband. "What would people say if they knew the things you talk to those children?" she demanded.

"They would say that I was putting immoral ideas into their heads," he responded cheerfully. "And so I am. Not that it does any good. I might as well be the *Ladies' Home Journal,* for any effects I can observe upon their conduct. They are so proper that I suspect that the truth is, they have no real inclination to be otherwise. They are content with the satisfaction of their intellectual curiosity. But sometimes a really wicked idea comes into my head. I think to myself, I will reform, and join a church, and when they come here to see me I will preach virtue to them, and be shocked when they attempt to tell me their ideas, and assure them that such notions lead to immorality. I have observed that immorality always sounds much more interesting when it is denounced. I think that by such methods —"

"Oh, hush — such nonsense!"

It was true. Discussion of "immoral ideas" seemed to have an antiseptic effect upon their emotions. They discussed themselves so freely that there was none of the excitement of uncertainty left in their attitude toward each other. When Felix took Emily home, and when sometimes they paused on the way to sit and talk a little in one of the leafless little parks, Felix might ask himself if this lovely girl beside him would like to have him put his arm about her: he might ask, but he knew the answer already — she would not. That is, she wouldn't mind, but it would mean nothing to her but a comradely caress. And somehow Felix did not like the idea of a "comradely caress." Love, he felt,— in spite of an effort to confine it within the sphere of his Socialist theories — was something not comradely in the least. He had an unhappy prevision of himself as falling

in love — really falling in love — with some worthless little hussy who would not understand, who would not even want to understand, the Marxian theory of value. It would serve him right! He *ought* to love Emily. But he didn't.

He thought that at least he might *try*. He put an experimental arm around her one night as they sat in the park. She was talking — oddly enough, about love — and apparently did not notice that his arm was there; and after a while he removed it. She did not notice that either. He was glad she had not. He never tried the experiment again.

XXIX The Transvaluation of Values

I

HE had not gone to see Helen for a long time. At first he stayed away in obscure defiance; then in embarrassment. Suddenly, after a long lapse of time, he realized that he had forgotten about her! The emotional hold she had had on him no longer existed. He could go and see her or not, without strange and perturbing emotions.

One reason why he had not wanted to go to see her was because of a conversation she had suggested, in regard to his career. He had not wanted to tell her that he was going to keep on working and not go back to school. Perhaps he had not wanted to tell her that because it seemed so terrible — for it had seemed terrible. But ever since Franz had assured him that he could go on not only to school but to college, it had ceased to seem terrible. The day when school opened had come and gone, almost unnoticed, certainly without a pang. Even Ed and Alice had done no more than ask him if he did not want to quit work and go back; something in his own attitude, some lessening of the emotional tension in his mind in regard to that question, had made them satisfied with his brief and casual answer.

He went to see Helen one evening. She received him with pleasure, and asked where he had been all this time. He explained that he had been working. He noticed that they met as old friends; and the past, to which they both referred, might have been a past of years agone. He realized that she was a very nice person — one of the nicest people he knew. He must go to see her oftener. . . . It was strange, that now he should no longer either worship or resent her! Something had happened. He wondered at it, and vaguely

realized that his friendship for Franz had something to do with it.

He did go to see her now and then. He felt as though he came from a different world — a world more real than hers. But her world interested him. . . . She found him very grown up — and didn't know whether she quite liked it or not. Something had happened to him. Could he be in love? She almost added, in her thoughts, "with somebody else?"

2

What Franz had predicted proved true. The cloud of suspicion, of hostility, gradually melted in the Central Branch meetings; Franz recovered his old power, and Felix and Emily again became the brilliant youngsters they had been in the esteem of their comrades; only J. Eames Sergeant remained in the outer darkness, and finally he went off with Peck and joined the Spiritualists. Felix breathed freely once more.

In the course of a few months, his character had appeared to change radically. Certainly he was no longer the shy boy he had been. He was now so accustomed to speaking to grown men as one of them, to having his opinions received with respect, and to find himself guiding their actions in matters of technical political policy, that it never occurred to him now to be afraid of anybody. He moved among men and women with ease, buoyed by a profound self-confidence. . . . He had been receiving a political education in the true sense. Though he had forgotten the little red pamphlet which had first led him to Socialism, its promises for the future of mankind had already been fulfilled for him in one important respect. He had, indeed, been living in ancient Greece; he was a citizen in a free commonwealth, and a power in the assembly of his equals.

3

He had learned many things from Franz. He was still engaged, day by day, in the process of what Franz called "the transvaluation of values." He was struggling with his romantic weaknesses, trying to adjust himself to the world in which he lived. It was a hard task, and he was only partly successful. . . .

His work at the factory had become a nightmare. The Christmas rush had begun, and there were two vacuum-pans for him to operate; he had to get one batch ready while the other was cooking under steam-pressure; and the suction engine on the second vacuum-pan was in bad shape and would constantly fill him with cold terror by stopping. He could vividly imagine the bursting of the vessel, and the spattering of that hundred pounds of white-hot liquid death. They were getting out twenty batches a day instead of ten, and he had no leisure for even a moment's rest. His hands and arms were covered with half-healed scratches and burns, and the scrubbing of the dirty kettles on Saturday afternoons became so much of an agony that Felix was thankful when these weekly cleansings were discontinued, and they trod upon a floor covered with hard accumulated filth an inch thick. In his anxiety over getting each new batch ready he would forget to record the proportions of sugar and glucose used in the last, and at the end of the day he would have to remember desperately, or guiltily guess at, the figures; and once the foreman found the empty slip on which he should have recorded the day's work, and was bitterly sceptical of Felix's assurances that he had the figures all in his head. In his haste he made mistakes, using too much of sugar or of glucose, or reversing the proportions; and twice he spoiled a batch altogether. Elephant came to his assistance by declaring that the scales were inaccurate, and the foreman's wrath was averted. But privately, Elephant told Felix that the only thing the matter with the scales was that he had slopped so much glucose on them that they were stuck to-

gether, and that he, Felix, was the messiest, absent-mindedest, God-damn carelessest person he had ever seen around a factory.

Felix knew that the criticism was just.

He told these things to Franz, who only smiled satirically, and said, "You'll learn." When Felix demanded something more specific, he reminded Felix that somebody who could do the work properly had been fired the summer before, and Felix put in his place. "They purposely chose an incompetant person, to save money. So you need not worry about that. It is their lookout. I do not sympathize with them — I do not care how many batches you spoil. But you are learning something. You have not finished learning it, but I expect you will before very long. And when you have learned it, you will not mind the pain you have suffered in learning it. No, I shall not tell you what it is. That is for you to find out. Meanwhile, I only tell you not to be ashamed of yourself for not being able to do a man's work; and not to be sorry for yourself either, since it was you who asked them for this job, not they who asked you to do it."

"Not to be ashamed of myself, and not to be sorry for myself," pondered Felix. "What then?"

"Use your brains."

Felix endeavoured to do so, and when the day's work was lengthened from ten to fourteen hours, he asked for a raise. The foreman glared at him; he had been slow that day, and had only caught up with the schedule by the assistance of Elephant, who watched one of his batches while Felix weighed out the other. But the foreman was helpless; it was impossible to get another person to do Felix's job at this time of year except by paying him much more than Felix asked. So Felix's wages were increased from seven to ten dollars, which with his overtime made a sum of sixteen dollars a week. When Felix reported this to Franz, the only comment was, "So far, so good. But you know what will happen to you when the Christmas rush is over, I suppose." Felix guessed what would happen; and when,

on the Saturday before Christmas, he was incontinently fired, he was not surprised. . . . But he could not imagine what it was that Franz thought he should have done. He had hung on as long as he could; what more could he do?

4

He looked about a little before he went to ask for another job. When he finally went into a printing office, it was with a dim memory of what he had read about Franklin's early career, mixed with his own childhood love of printing, with cheap sets of rubber type. But even as he entered, he smiled at himself. Franz would say this was just another example of his romantic folly. He was not living in Franklin's day, but in the era of electric power; and sure enough, when he was given a job, it was feeding a hand-press that was run by a whirling belt from an electrically-turned shaft. This was not printing, he reflected, but tending a machine. Nevertheless he set to work learning his job.

He had to take out with his left hand the printed sheet that lay in the jaws of the press, and in the same instant put in a fresh sheet with his right hand, laying it carefully against the little metal guides so that it would register — and all this must be done while the jaws of the insatiable little monster swiftly opened and closed. If his hand stayed there a second too long, it would be crushed to a pulp — unless, with his other hand, he grasped and pulled the lever provided for such emergencies.

Felix, in spite of his clumsiness, had a potential manual dexterity; the only thing which kept him from being a good press-feeder was his fear of getting his hand caught. He ran his press slowly at first, as was expected of him while he was learning; but after a few days the impatience of the foreman — and still more than that, the banter of his fellow-feeders, boys no older than himself, but expert in their task — spurred him to an increasing swiftness. Within a week he was running the machine at full speed, and only when a

recurrent fear would come over him did his right hand slight the rapid but careful touch which pressed the paper accurately against the guides. When this fear did come, he would grow increasingly nervous and awkward, and finally would have to pull the lever to save his hand from being caught. After such an incident he would stand at his machine perspiring and trembling for a minute, and then, bracing himself, would set it going again; at first slowly, and then by degrees more swiftly, until it was running as fast as those of the two boys beside him, who whistled and laughed and talked at their work, unconscious of any danger. He forced himself to emulate their unconsciousness. His pride, if not his will, was strong enough to throw him into a self-induced hypnotic state of indifference, and day after day he stood above his machine talking and laughing like them as he made the quick, automatic movements which put in and took out the paper.

But one night, after he had spent the evening writing, he had a dream. He dreamed that he had come home and tried to write, and that he could not pick up his pen, and when he looked closely, he found that he had no hand! He woke in a fit of terror, and instantly his mind went back to the printing office. He saw himself standing above his press, thrusting that hand into the champing jaws of the machine — the Little Wonder, it was called, but he had come to call it in his own mind the Little Devil. For it had a soul, evil and tricky. It rebelled against the servitude to which it was doomed by capitalism; and it took its revenge upon those who were doomed to serve it. In dumb patient hatred, it waited the moment when it could sink its fangs into the hand of its slave-master. Felix thought of his brother Jim, who had given to a machine, one by one, pieces of five fingers and thumbs. . . . He saw himself, thrusting his hand — his right hand — the hand he used to write with — into that wicked little machine. And not once, but a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand times, over and over, day after day, week after

week,— with incredible rapidity, once a second, sixty times a minute. It was only a question of time. . . . He saw himself, putting his precious hand into that terrible jaw, and turned uncomfortably on his pillow. Was this himself that he saw? Was it true? No, it was not possible, it was an absurd dream. But it was true. *He* was doing that. In his half-dreaming state he asked himself, was it because he had to — because he was a prisoner, condemned for some horrible crime to such a punishment? No, he had asked for that job. Absurd! . . . He twisted and writhed in his bed. It all seemed so impossible, so grotesque, so silly.

5

In the morning the nightmarish light which his dream had cast over his waking life had not quite vanished. He walked soberly to the shop, and going up to the foreman asked to be transferred to some other department. He did not think he would make a good press-feeder. The foreman frowned, and sent him into the lithographing department.

Here he was put to work on the "bronzing machine." Great sheets of beer-labels, fresh from the press, and covered with slightly sticky areas, were fed into the top of the machine, and came out at the bottom with those same sticky areas dusted over with a fine bronze powder. This was the way "gold-printing" was done.

The bronzing-machine was in a little coop by itself. Felix and another boy ran it, one feeding in the sheets at the top, and the other straightening them as they came out at the bottom. It was easy enough work, but the air of the little coop was filled with the fine floating bronze-dust. He breathed it into his lungs, and his throat became sore with it. Eyes, mouth, nose, skin, scalp, were bronzed at the end of the day, and it could hardly be washed out.

After a week of this work, Felix rebelled, and threw up the job.

He went to Franz.

"Well!" said Franz. "At last!"

Felix was puzzled.

"I've been waiting to see you throw up a job," explained Franz. "You've finally done it. How do you feel?"

"Fine!" said Felix.

"I thought so," said his mentor. He lighted a cigar, and settled himself comfortably in his chair. "You have foolish ideas in your head. You hate work, and so you do whatever comes along. That is silly. One must choose. You have begun, by choosing *not* to do something. Now see if you can take the next step — choose *to* do something. What is it you would like to do?"

Felix went away thoughtfully. Going home, he scrubbed the hateful bronze-dust thoroughly out of his skin, and swore that he would never again do any kind of work he did not like. Next morning he put on his best clothes and strolled down town. He wandered about all morning, looking in a leisurely manner in at shop windows, surveying factories from the outside with a speculative and disdainful air, and obeying the impulse which told him to keep away from them. But what was it he *did* want to do? He went to visit Feinbaum in his little tailor shop, and listened, without hearing, to the other's "idees." He had some lunch, and wandered about town again. In the afternoon he stopped in front of the Port Royal *News;* there was a new press right behind the plate-glass window, so everybody could see it. Felix watched the first edition run off, and then started away.

6

Then he stopped, and came back. If he chose what he *wanted* to do, he would choose to work on a newspaper. . . . He looked in at the window. A man was wiping the ink off the rollers. . . . Should Felix go in and ask for a job?

No — there was no use. He started away again.

But an idea came to him. He might get a job wiping off the rollers, or something like that; and in time — some day, perhaps — he would get a chance to write for the paper. . . . Anyway, there was no harm in trying to get that job wiping off the rollers.

He turned back, and went into the office.

In the first edition which Felix had seen run off the press, and which was just being sold on the streets, there was an advertisement, offering some young man a chance to learn reporting. The man in the office thought Felix had come in answer to that advertisement, and sent him upstairs to the city editor. The city editor talked to him for three minutes, offered him eight dollars a week to start, and told him to come around next Monday morning.

Felix went away infinitely astonished.

XXX Vistas

1

THAT night Felix hurried to the Vogelsang flat, to give the news of the great event. Franz was pleased, but when Felix began to insist that it was due to his advice, he demurred.

"The fact that you have a little more sense than you used to have, is due to me," he said. "But what you do with it is your own affair. Don't try to make me out a fortune-teller."

"Haven't you admitted that you know everything?" countered Felix.

"It is all right for me to say such things about myself. But you should not say them to me. For I, too, am human, all too human. It is all right for me to pose as knowing everything; but if I once begin to believe what I say, I am lost. Be very careful, young man, or you will get me to making a fool of myself."

"Yes, he is egotistic enough as it is," commented his wife.

"It is not," explained Franz, "that I mind taking the credit for your successes. But I do not wish to be held responsible for your failures. No, this new job is your own affair. You got it; see that you keep it. And if you get fired in a month, do not come blaming me."

2

Felix found that his first duties on the newspaper were to "meet the trains" and learn to run a typewriter. "Meeting the trains" meant going to the railway station and getting the names and addresses of everybody who came to town or went away, even if only for a day's visit. This proved to be easier than Felix would have supposed. He

had only to go up to people in a business-like way, touch his hat, and rattle off the formula he composed. "Good morning. I am a reporter for the *News*. Will you give me your name and address? Mrs. John T. Brown. B-r-o-w-n? Yes. 1-3-4-2 Magnolia Boulevard. And you are going where? Christopher Town. To visit whom? Relatives. For how long? A week. Thank you!" It seemed that if he ignored the fact that this was an impertinence, so did the people whom he subjected to this inquisition. It was not really, he thought, that they were anxious to see their names in a newspaper; it was rather that they submitted to any inquiry which had an official air. This brisk and authoritative mode of procedure enabled him to "clean up" a crowded station in fifteen minutes, and bring in nearly a column of these items daily. It was foolish drudgery, of course; but he did not mind facing people now, and so it was not, as it would have been a year before, exquisitely painful; it was merely a bore.

He was given the "lodge run" on Monday and Thursday evenings, and went from hall to hall interviewing suspicious sergeants-at-arms through the wicket in the doors, and eliciting the names of newly elected officials. On the second day, the undertakers, the banks, and a list of lawyer's offices were added to his "run." At the undertaker's he met the *Record* reporter, Deems Morgan, a cub like himself, who initiated him into the "first principles of reporting," which he himself had only recently learned.

They were in the little back room of the undertaker's establishment, Felix seated in a chair and Deems comfortably reclining on the pine box which was to enclose a coffin, smoking a cigarette, while Harkness, the affable red-headed undertaker, was arranging the draperies becomingly about a corpse in a coffin on the other side of the room. "The first great principle of newspaper work," enunciated Deems, blowing out a cloud of cigarette smoke, "is to loaf on the job. Isn't that so, Bill?" He turned to the undertaker for confirmation.

"'S been my experience," agreed the undertaker, standing off to view his handiwork critically. "The best reporters were the ones that loafed the most. Never knew a reporter that didn't loaf, to amount to anything. Usually got fired right off."

"You see," explained Deems, "you have to loaf either in the office or outside — because there's not enough work to keep you busy. And if you loaf around the office, the city editor doesn't like it. It's a reflection on him. He has to work all the harder to keep you busy, and he commences to be sore at you. If you're out a long time on a story, that means that you've had hard work getting it, and that means that you are a good reporter. If you loaf enough, you get your wages raised. You just try it and see."

Felix was amused but incredulous.

"The next great principle is to forget all you ever read in books about reporting. You read in books about 'scoops' and 'beats.' There's nothing to it. In practice, you find that the best way is to tell the reporter from the other paper all you know, and let him tell you all he knows. Team work, that's the idea. Never try to put anything over on the rival reporter. It doesn't pay."

This was so revolutionary an idea, so opposed to all that Felix had read in romantic fiction about reporting, that he suspected it might really be true. At any rate, it was very interesting.

"The third great principle of newspaper work is to turn in a big expense account. That won't bother you and me for a while, but keep it in mind. It impresses a city editor when he sees how much carfare and long-distance tolls you have run up in getting a story. He knows the story is good when it costs money to get, and he puts a big headline over it, and you get a reputation as a 'star.'— But the greatest principle of all is the first: loaf on the job."

Felix was not wholly convinced. If he spent more time at the undertaker's than need be, it was to enjoy Deems Morgan's talk. He liked Deems, and began unconsciously

to imitate him in the slouch with which he wore his hat, and in the smoking of cigarettes. At first he did not like them, but he did not become sick, and he persevered. It made their talks, in the gruesome milieu of the back of undertakers' establishments, more companionable to be thus both smoking cigarettes.

On the third day, Felix got his first real "assignment" — a trivial one, but not without its thrill for Felix.

"The Jews are having some kind of holiday," said the city editor. "Go to Rabbi Nathan — you'll find him at the new synagogue up on Main Street — and get something about it. If you can make it interesting enough, you can write anything up to half a column. And don't try to be funny about it, either — the owner of this paper is a Jew."

Felix had no intention of being funny about it. He intended to write a column story so interesting that everybody would read it — and to make sure of his facts beforehand, he read all that the public library could furnish of information about that particular holiday, and the religion of the Jews in general; and armed with this information, he went to get his interview. It had been reassuring to learn from Deems that the synagogue up on Main Street belonged to the "Reformed" Jewish faith, and that part of its services were conducted in English. . . . Doubtless the Rabbi's speech would be fairly intelligible to him.

3

To Felix's surprise, the young man in ordinary clothes who invited him into his study at the back of the synagogue was the Rabbi himself. There was something familiar about him; Felix was sure he had seen him somewhere before. His voice — a rich, clear, resonant voice — was particularly reminiscent of some incident in Felix's past; but it was not until the interview was over, and Felix was on his way back to the office, that he realized that the Rabbi was the stranger with whom he had talked for a moment

in front of Turner Hall, a year or two ago, when he first came to town! . . .

But even before that memory came, Felix was delighted with the man he had come to interview. Felix mentioned some more or less recondite fact about the origin of the holiday in question, and the Rabbi began to talk about it in the manner of a scientific observer — interestedly, and yet disinterestedly, with all the air of a book on comparative religion. He added to Felix's store of knowledge many quaint and humanly interesting facts, and an hour passed as pleasantly for Felix as ever it had in the world of books. Here was a discovery indeed! Why, this man was not a preacher at all, he was a scholar. Felix determined to see more of him.

As for the young Rabbi, he was hardly less pleased with Felix. To find a reporter who knew anything about the subject he had come to ask about, was a new and refreshing experience. And when that afternoon he read the lucid and sympathetic column in the *News*, his opinion was confirmed.

"Did you really say just that?" asked the Rabbi's wife, when he had shown her the story.

"No," he said. "But he has caught almost the trick of my style. Look at that sentence: 'In proportion as they suffered, they came to have less regard for the dignities of the priesthood, and more enthusiasm for the warm reassurances of prophecy.' That, my dear, is the English language, and I think it is the first time that I have been represented in our local press as speaking it. The question of whether those are my exact words is of minor importance."

4

By the end of his first week, Felix had become superficially acquainted with his fellow reporters on the *News*. There was no one that he liked so well as Deems. The one he had most chance to talk with seemed to Felix a rather objectionable person — Philip Vincent, his name was. Besides his ordinary reportorial duties, he held the position of

"dramatic editor." He was an egotistic, affected young man, who wore a negligent Windsor tie, sported yellow gloves, and sometimes carried a stick. He supposed himself to be a brilliant writer, and wrote what to Felix seemed insufferable nonsense about the current plays. "Smart-Alec stuff!" said Felix to himself contemptuously, reading the patter which occupied the rest of a page almost filled with photographs of the leading actors and most beautiful actresses of the week. Its tone was that of a dressing-room familiarity with the personalities of the actors and actresses in question — a gossipy, allusive, artificially-witty style. Felix knew — though he had not been to the theatre a dozen times in his life — how dramatic criticism should be written. He wished that he had Vincent's page. But it never occurred to him that his secret dislike of Vincent was envy.

The baseball reporter, Sells, was a bluff, hearty person, inclined to fatness. He wrote with ease in the cacophonous jargon in which it was at that time the custom to report sporting events; but he did not pride himself, as Vincent did, on his style. He carried in his pocket a little volume of Charles Lamb's essays, and was understood to have once upon a time had an essay of his own accepted by the *Atlantic Monthly*. On the strength of this, Felix had once undertaken to talk to him about books, but Sells had read, it seemed, nothing written in the last fifty years. Jack London and Frank Norris were mere names to him; he supposed that they wrote "historical novels, like Booth Tarkington." A queer person!

Hemenway, the city hall and police reporter, was a frowning, short-sighted, very busy person, who would come in hurriedly and sit down at his typewriter as though he were about to write some vastly important revelation of bribery, corruption and scandal in municipal politics, though when Felix scanned his laboriously written columns in the evening paper they seemed to be merely the minutes of one of the dullest council meetings ever held. Yet this man

was reputed to be the best "crime reporter" in town. Doubtless there were events to which his meticulous and dogged accuracy gave a richer significance, but Felix had as yet no reason to feel in awe of him.

The city editor, Joseph Groome — to the older reporters "Joe," and the rest "J. G."— was a tall, kindly, patient Irishman, whom Felix liked better than any one else about the office, and toward whom he felt a real loyalty. He was particularly patient with Felix's first mistakes, and spared no pains in making his instructions sufficiently minute whenever anything beyond Felix's experience came. With such a tutor, Felix did not mind admitting his ignorance of nearly everything in the actual world which an enterprising young man ought to know, such as the names of the prominent people in town, and the location of various public buildings, churches and hotels. . . .

The owner of the paper, Mr. Rosenthal, Felix saw occasionally going to and from his private office. He was a spick-and-span little Jew, with a nervous manner, and cold eyes. Everybody about the office seemed to fear him a little.

The managing editor, Hastings, was Rosenthal's executive; he was kept very busy writing the editorials he was told to write and carrying out the other wishes of his superior, and was seldom seen.

Felix congratulated himself in secret that he had more ability than any of the lot of them. He burned for an opportunity to show what he could do. He was especially annoyed that Vincent should be the one to write about plays. And when, during his second week, a Shaw play came to town, and Vincent sneered at it with his ignorant flippancy, Felix became desperate. If only he had a chance to write about plays!

"Speaking of Shaw," said Franz, when Felix complained of these matters to him, "there is a second or third-rate German Shaw at the Deutsches Theatre this week. Don't you want to come to see it? We are going, and you can

come along. We'll tell you enough about what is going on so that you can follow the action."

Felix went. The German dramatist appeared to him to be rather a fourth or a fifth-rate Shaw. But as he sat there, listening to speeches he could not understand, and forced to reflect upon the theme of the play for entertainment, there came to his mind the words in which one would write about this play — if one were writing about it. And by the end of the performance, he had his article fully composed in his thoughts. He hurried home, and wrote it down. The next morning he copied it on the typewriter at the office, and then, with malicious intent, showed it to Vincent.

He had discussed the theme of the play eloquently, and adverted to its inadequate treatment only in a few glancing phrases. He had intended it as a rebuke to Vincent's greenroom gossip Muse. But Vincent did not know this. He read it through with interest. "That's not a bad piece of writing, you know," he said. "Why don't you put in a little about the actors and hand it in to J. G.?"

"But I didn't intend it for the paper!" said Felix.

"That's all right. But the Dutchies will be pleased to have some notice taken of their affairs. And you needn't be afraid of butting in on my field. I don't understand German. If it's all right with J. G., it's all right with me. Go to it, and become our German drama expert!"

Felix did not explain that he did not understand German either. He followed Vincent's advice, and put in something about the actors and actresses, and handed it to J. G. "Good stuff!" said J. G. "You can do this next week too, if you want to."

Felix reflected with some amazement that the witty Socialism of his article — for so he conceived it — was good stuff because there was a large German population in town who were flattered by attention to their stock-company. As long as he said a few nice things about the actors, he could

preach whatever he wanted to — pretending, of course, that he was describing the play. A devious affair, journalism. But interesting!

XXXI People

I

ONE of the most interesting things about newspaper work was the opportunity it gave for meeting people. Even the hotel-clerks, the cashier at the Second National Bank, some of the lawyers on his "run," the weather observer at the postoffice, the cranky old postmaster himself, the red-headed undertaker, were persons of curious and entertaining personality. And every day some one new!

He went back with pleasure to his impressions of the young Rabbi whom he had interviewed that first week on the paper. It would be a pity not to follow up what promised to be an interesting acquaintance. The Rabbi had seemed to like him. What excuse could he find for going to see him again?

Of course, he might go to hear him preach. But probably his sermons would be — sermons.

At any rate, it would be worth while finding out.

He went to the synagogue the next Friday night. The young Rabbi's sermon was one of a series dealing with contrasting types of Jewish character, from Spinoza down to more frivolous personalities. This time the subject happened to be Heine — one of Felix's particular enthusiasms.

And yes, it was true — the Rabbi did retain in the pulpit, astonishingly enough, the qualities of quick and free intelligence which made his private conversation so delightful.

Remembering his experience with the German play, Felix wrote a column report of the sermon, and submitted it with diffidence to the city editor.

J. G. raised his eyebrows. His reporters were not in the habit of going out of their way to report sermons. But,

like the dramatic criticism, "religious news" was a good feature, and he printed Felix's story.

The next Friday, when Felix appeared at the synagogue again, the Rabbi stopped beside him before the services began, and congratulated him upon it.

"Newspaper work," the Rabbi went on to say, quite as if he and Felix were all alone and he was not going to ascend the pulpit in three minutes, "is the best possible apprenticeship for a young writer. And Port Royal is one of the best possible towns in which to serve such an apprenticeship, I think. Did you grow up here? — no? Then you can realize clearly the difference between this and most other cities of its size in the Middle West. Port Royal has a quality of its own. I suppose this is partly due to the pioneers from New England, who brought with them ideals and a respect for learning; but it is more due, I think, to the Germans, who left home because they loved liberty, and brought with them a taste for music, discussion and good beer. There are so many of the Germans, and they have so much enthusiasm, that they dominate the town. And for some reason they are not as solemn and stodgy as Germans often are — perhaps because of a slight but pervasive Flemish strain. Their robust mirthfulness is extraordinarily like the scenes in Flemish paintings. At all events, their influence has stamped the town with its own flavour. It is true, they have never been able to convert the descendants of New England to gymnastics and choral singing; but they have laid out these magnificent parks, and built our library — which, you will have noticed, is well stocked with free-thought literature. . . . But I must be going to my pulpit. Wait for me when the services are over, and we'll go to my house and talk. My wife will make us some sandwiches, and we'll have some beer, and get really acquainted."

2

Felix was astonished as well as flattered. He had never expected to drink beer with a clergyman. But that touch

put him completely at his ease — as perhaps it was intended to do. On the way home, the Rabbi took up the subject of Port Royal again. "You will have noticed that the town has a somewhat metropolitan atmosphere. Or, at least, it is less puritanical than the ordinary American town. By puritanical I do not, of course, mean good — I mean hypocritical. Port Royal does not hide its vices; in fact, it does not regard them as vices. I imagine that the sight of our Germans taking their women-folk and children along with them to their drinking places, as though it were not really wicked to drink, has broken down the more primitive modes of American intolerance. And their other habit of stating their desires (such as the desire for beer on Sunday) in the form of philosophical theories (such as the theory of personal liberty) has resulted in a general readiness to believe that ideas are matters of real importance. The effect of all this has been to give Port Royal a somewhat European air. My wife says I romanticize about Port Royal; perhaps I do! I like the town. I suppose you know about its past? In the great days of river-traffic it was a Pleasure City, famous all over the Mississippi region. It has a long record of defiance of laws passed by the puritanical state legislature, and more than once the state militia has been sent to enforce obedience. Just a few years ago the legislature passed a law forbidding prize-fights, and Port Royal kept on having them. So finally a company of farmer-boys with bayonets was sent to prevent the big bout between Burns and Mitchell. They marched into the Coliseum — and were told that it was all right, that there wasn't going to be any prize-fight, just a little boxing-match, and they were invited to take ringside seats. They did, and under the eyes of the state national guard sent to enforce the law, the biggest prize-fight ever held in the state was pulled off! We are a little tamed now, shorn of our former glories, but still quite a place to live. I am sure you will find it so."

They encamped in the Rabbi's little parlour, and the sand-

wiches and beer speedily appeared. It was really, Felix thought, when he found himself seated in a big comfortable chair in front of the Rabbi's grate, with the Rabbi's wife, a handsome and motherly young woman, refilling his glass and pressing another sandwich upon him, while he and the Rabbi discussed philosophy and politics — it was really like an evening at the Vogelsangs; except that the Rabbi had no such airs of omniscience, seeming rather to have great respect for Felix's opinions. But there was another difference: the Rabbi's voice, and that of his wife, flowed to a different tune, one more suave and subtle than the one to which he was accustomed. He found himself falling easily into their manner, except at times when in his anxiety to make a point he relapsed into the ruder, brusquer mode of speech which he realized that he had learned in the branch meetings.

3

This difference was still more marked the third time he came. They had brought with them from the synagogue a young married woman, not a member of the congregation, but a friend of the Rabbi's who had come to hear him talk. "About a third of my audience," he had remarked humorously to Felix, "are heretics — that is to say, Christians. You have doubtless observed the earnest efforts I make to bring them back to the true faith." Mrs. Miller was a pretty and discontented woman, with a considerable interest in books, and a sharp and rather witty tongue. She was discontented with the whole world, but more particularly with marriage. That is to say, with her own marriage. But she conveyed this latter fact through generalizations transparent enough to allow one to deduce the particular which she really had in mind, and witty enough to make the frank revelation devoid of any offence. Felix was amazed at the capacity of words for saying so much while apparently saying so little; no one could have gone away and said that Mrs. Miller was complaining of her husband's

stupidity; and yet that was just what she was doing. And Felix was pleased, too, at being included in the circle of a confidence however tricked out with humorous innuendo. There was a lightness and airiness about the conversation which he had never come across, except in books; and it was interesting to see how the Rabbi would put an argument, which he and Felix had rehearsed the preceding week in heavy philosophic terms, into this light and laughing kind of talk. He was still more pleased when, at his first attempt, he found himself able to play at the same verbal game. It was only doing in talk what he had learned by heart in books, after all!

When he began to talk, as it were, in her language, Mrs. Miller turned her attention to him, and as if to test his powers, pressed him with what seemed a rapier-pointed wit, apropos of some remark he had just made on the subject of morals from what he considered the Socialist point of view. He had spoken of candour as if it were a universal panacea for all the ills of the troubled soul. And she, representing herself as the protagonist of "bourgeois hypocrisy," attacked him with swift, laughing questions. It would be easy enough to answer those questions in solemnly sociological phraseology; but he understood that his task was to translate his ideas, if he could, into impromptu Dolly Dialogue. And so he fenced with her; sometimes she pressed him dangerously near the edge of the possibilities of speech, it seemed to him; a shade more and he would be brutally, almost indecently, frank; and he had to recover himself with a sharp *double entendre*. At last he stumbled upon a pun. Then she relented, and crossed swords with that more experienced swordsman, the Rabbi. But she gave him a glance of appreciation, of admiration, of gratitude. And he felt that he had been, quite amazingly contrary to any notions he had ever had of himself, a social success.

4

They came away from the house together, and he accompanied her home.

"You can talk," she said, after a silence.

"When I have some one to talk with," he replied.

Again that glance of appreciation, now edged with magic by the moonlight. His glance met hers, and responded to it.

"You mustn't say things like that to me," she said softly, and he knew that she meant his look and not his words.

"I can't help it when you encourage me," he said.

She drew her cloak around her. "I am a wicked old woman," she said. "No, don't contradict me. But for once I am going to be very, very good. I am *not* going to invite you to come to see me."

They had stopped in front of her house, and she held out her hand.

"Do invite me to come to see you," Felix urged lightly.

"No," she said. "We will see each other at 'the Rabbits' now and then — properly chaperoned. And now go home." But she held his hand for a moment longer than need be.

Felix understood well enough what game they were playing. She was not in earnest, nor was he. They were not in love with each other, and never would be. They were just playing. Yesterday he would have scorned it as a silly bourgeois game. He could understand why *she* should want to play it. She did not love her husband, and she was too much of a coward to seek for real love. But why should *he* like this game? He, a Socialist, a member of the intellectual proletariat!

He remembered what Franz had said to him: "Perhaps you are only a descendant of a broken-down middle-class family, and you will go back where you belong." Perhaps he liked this game because he was really, at heart, bourgeois. . . . He considered that idea, and then thrust it from him. No, never!

But the fact remained that he really did like to play this silly game. And he wanted to see Mrs. Miller again — very soon. His new life, as a reporter, meant, he reflected, that he could be free to see such people, to experiment with life, to learn what he himself was really like. . . .

5

But next morning the managing editor called him into his office.

"Felix," he said, "I am sorry to tell you that we have decided to let you go. Mr. Rosenthal, the publisher, who has had a great deal of newspaper experience, has been watching your work, and has come to the conclusion that you will not be a success as a newspaper man. I tell you this quite frankly, because you do not want to waste your time in doing work for which you are not suited. Mr. Rosenthal thinks you are not sufficiently enterprising to make a good reporter. You do your routine work very well, but you do not seem to have what is called a nose for news. I am sorry, of course. You will have the regular two weeks' notice, and you can use as much time as you please in looking for other work. I am sure you will find something more congenial — and I wish you good luck." He shook hands with Felix, and turned back to his desk to finish an editorial.

XXXII Advice

I

FELIX went down the stairs pale, gasping for breath, and holding on to the banister for the support which his trembling knees were hardly able to give. It was as if he had been struck a terrific physical blow. For the moment he was not thinking at all; and when he reached the street he burst out into hysterical laughter. It was a spring-like day in early March, and he went to a little park just outside the business section of the town and sat on a bench and looked at the dry basin of the little fountain and the silly nymph who, with melting snow dripping from her shoulders, insouciantly poured out nothing from a carven sea-shell.

He seemed to hurt in every part of his soul. For a while he sat there, only suffering.

Then his sick egotism began to rally. His first emotion was pity for himself. He saw himself going back into a factory, wearing dirty overalls, doing a man's work for a boy's pay; saw himself getting up at dawn and trudging to the bleak walls of his imprisonment — and coming home, too tired to think or write, at dark. Glucose and bronze-dust! Was this what he was condemned to?

Then came anger. No! he said to himself. He had found his work, and he would do it. He belonged here, here among people who had leisure for thought and talk. He would not go back. He would not go back.

Then a fierce scornful pride possessed him. He had been fired — as if he were not as good as those men in the office, Vincent and Sells and — Why, he was better than any of

them, than the whole lot put together. What was the matter with Rosenthal? Was he crazy?

Nevertheless — the fact was that he was fired.

Of course he might go to the other paper and ask for a job. But being fired by the *News* was a poor recommendation. They would not take him. But at least he could try it. He rose. Now? No — not yet. First he must show these fools something. . . .

But what could he show them? What more could he do than he had done already? What did they want of him, anyway? A nose for news! He pondered that. Perhaps they were right, in a way. It was true that he did just what he was told to do. He had brought in nothing by his own enterprise — except sermons and alleged dramatic criticism. Sermons! No wonder they had fired him. . . . He was not a reporter, he was a bookworm — as much out of place among this machinery as among any other kind of machinery. Yes, it had all been a mistake. Let him not imagine vain things. What was the use to think of "showing them" anything? What was the use to try? It would be foolish to hope, because it would only mean that he would be hurt again. No, he would take the managing editor's advice, and spend most of his time in the next two weeks looking for another job. . . . Of course he would not find anything; but that would be better than feverishly trying to show them that they had been mistaken. They had shown him. . . . All right. All right.

He wanted to talk to some one. Franz? No. He remembered what Franz had said. "Don't come here complaining to me if you get fired in a month." It was just a month.

How did Franz know? — But probably anybody could tell to look at him that he would be a failure. Franz had known.

He might go to Franz and say, "Well, you were right again."

But no, he would not do that. Franz had told him to

stay away. Yet he must talk to somebody. To whom should he go? Helen? Never. She would be sorry for him. Then — ?

Why, there was old Wheels, of course. He had completely forgotten about old Wheels. He had not seen him since that night on the Island. He would go to see Wheels. Good old Wheels! He felt cheered.

2

Wheels was making himself some tea on a little stove in the back of his place. He peered at Felix, recognized him, and with a grunt poured another cup of tea. Then he brought out from a cupboard a black bottle. "In honour of the occasion," he said, "we will have rum in our tea," and he poured a little in each cup, and cut some bread.

Felix flushed. "It's true I have not been here for a long time," he said.

"Don't think I am reproaching you," said Wheels. "I didn't expect you."

"Why not?" Felix demanded.

"Because you are young. You have vast possibilities for happiness — for what I call the mood of success. You see I do not recognize success as a real fact. But there is a mood in which we feel successful, and are consequently happy. You have been in that mood. Naturally you had no use for me. Now you are no longer in that mood. So you have come to me. I welcome you."

He passed the buttered bread, sprinkled over with green snippings of chives. Felix bit into it gratefully, and drank of his tea.

"Is failure also only a mood?" he asked.

"There you have it! That is the cheering aspect of pessimism. Yes, failure also is an illusion. Tell me, what has happened to you?"

"I am under the depressing illusion that I have lost my job," said Felix.

Wheels laughed. "A particularly absurd illusion," he

said. "It is impossible to lose your job. You only seem to do so. The fact is that what we flatteringly call society insists upon our working. It may appear for a moment to relax that demand, but never fear, it will be at you again. Even if you try to unfit yourself for work by drink and drugs, it will rummage for you in the gutter, take infinite pains to put you in working shape again, and insist upon your performing some of the idiotic motions which conduce to its sense of collective self-respect. I shouldn't wonder if presently society decided to abolish drink altogether, because it interferes with work. Not that I should mind!"

"But the trouble is," said Felix, "that the idiotic motions which I have been going through conduce to my own sense of self-respect. Since I last saw you, I have changed my occupation. I am now — or I was until today — a reporter."

"Not bad," said Wheels. "In fact, if I were society, I think that is just what I should insist upon your being. I know of no better way to get the illusion of useful work out of so essentially useless a person as a poet. I would make them all reporters. And now I understand why I have read my *News* with less boredom for the last few weeks. Did you write that very amusing account of Fulda's play?"

"Yes," said Felix, "did you like it?"

"The philosophy was all wrong, of course. You have evidently become a Socialist since I saw you last."

"Yes," said Felix mischievously, "I paid my dues with that five dollar bill you gave me."

"I should call that a misappropriation of funds," said Wheels. "Don't tell me you gave it *all* to the Socialists!"

"No — I spent part of it on a pretty girl there in the park. Your money procured me a kiss, two benedictines, and beer for the crowd. That should satisfy you."

For answer Wheels took from his pocket a little account book, in which he gravely set down those items. "That comes to only about two dollars, as I figure it," he said.

"You owe me three dollars. Do not think for one moment that I am going to have it on my conscience that I helped finance a pernicious organization like the Socialist party. Think!—"

His voice lowered to an ironic whisper. "Illusions are sometimes very real. The Socialists want to make a better world. Suppose — suppose they should appear to succeed!"

"A world of beauty and joy!" suggested Felix.

"And I — fat and colour-blind and tone-deaf! No, I can live in the world as it is with some satisfaction. I have my philosophy. But what use would my philosophy be in such a world as you threaten me with? — Give me that three dollars!"

"Nothing doing," said Felix. "You gambled with that money. And part of it you lost. What I gave to the Socialists helped them, in fact, to hold the convention at which a Socialist was nominated for Congress who polled the biggest Socialist vote ever cast in this state. Take that!"

"H'm," said Wheels. "Do you refer to Fred Hutter?" A vast malicious smile spread over his fat face. "Then the ironic destinies are with me after all. Fred Hutter is not a Socialist. I happen to know him. He is a more amusing type of fanatic. He is an Anarchist. Or used to be. There were no Anarchists in Port Royal, so he joined the Socialist camp. Just as he joined a trade-union — for his own purposes.— Evidently you have not read your own paper this afternoon?"

"No."

"Then I can tell you something. At the time you nominated Fred Hutter to Congress, he had other fish to fry. He was frying them. And that nomination served to bring his quiet activities to the light. Perhaps the newspapers are mistaken. Perhaps it is what you call a 'capitalist plot.' But I think that what you did by your nomination was to put a noose about Fred Hutter's neck."

He had picked up the paper from the floor, and with the

same broad, malicious grin held it up for Felix to see the headlines.

SOCIALIST ARRESTED
AS DYNAMITER

Fred Hutter, Structural Iron Worker
and Candidate for Congress
Indicted in Farrington

Charged with Blowing Up Non-Union
Bridge Last July — Grand
Jury Bares Plot

Felix took the paper with trembling fingers, and read the story underneath. Then he turned to Wheels. "I — I helped to nominate him," he said.

Wheels poured out another cup of tea, and measured some rum into it, then handed it to Felix. "Never mind," he said. "You only thought you did. It wasn't you, my boy — it was the ironic destinies. But all the same, you shouldn't have given my three dollars to the Socialists — it was bound to bring them bad luck."

Felix took out some money and shoved it across the table to Wheels.

"Take it back," he said.

"Thanks," said Wheels. "And now I'll tell you something else. The *Record* prints the fact that Fred Hutter was expelled from the Socialist party by the state executive committee last night, for advocating direct action and saying that political parties were useless. Just in time, as it happened. Your Socialist party is safe enough — and why should you care what happens to an Anarchist?" He laughed. "We live in a world of chaos and accident. Politicians think they can tame that chaos. They are fools. Dreamers are the only wise ones. They know that they can take fragments here and there out of the chaos, and gild them with their fancy, until they become shining and beautiful. There is no other beauty. The world itself is hideous. You cannot do anything with it. But you can

dream beautiful dreams. *You* are not a politician. Leave that to the fools. You are a poet."

Felix remembered his personal misfortune again. "Yes," he said, "a poet who has lost his job."

Wheels rose. "I am in the mood to prophesy," he said, smiling. "You will not go back to the factory. The ironic destinies have other uses for you. Your rôle will be played up in the sunlight. It is not the intention of the gods to starve you, or maim your body. They want to break your heart, and tear your soul to pieces. And so they will feed you with hope, with success, with power. It is useless for me to tell you not to believe in these things. You will. But from time to time, as the gods afflict you, you will remember what I have said, that beauty exists only in your own dreams.

"Now forget this, and go off and be happy!"

3

Felix went away, still shaken by the Hutter catastrophe. What would Central Branch do? And what would Franz Vogelsang say? . . . But as the image of Franz rose up before him, smiling, powerful, cynically self-possessed, he realized that he had been unduly alarmed. He knew well enough what Franz would say. . . . He could see the meeting next Friday evening, with the depressed and deploring faces of his friends and enemies, waiting for Franz to come, so that they could denounce him. He would be late. It was a trick of his. They would think he was afraid, and they would say things they would be sorry for afterward. He would come in the middle of a speech by one of Simpson's partisans, and sit down and light a cigar, and smile, and smile, as he listened. And when everybody was through denouncing him, he would get up and say, "You are fools! I have told you so before, many times, and now I must tell you so again. You believe what you read in the newspapers." And so on. He would rehabilitate Fred Hutter. He would make them all ashamed of themselves.

He would win them over, as he always did. It would be his greatest triumph.

The meeting would end with Franz elected the head of a committee to raise funds for Fred Hutter's defence. . . .

Wheels was a fool. He remembered that parting prophecy, and as he went along the street he murmured, "Romantic rot!"

He started home. "The ironic destinies! — old Wheels has been reading Thomas Hardy."

He turned suddenly and went back to the office. "Go off and be happy! — philosophic mush!"

He went in and drew his pay.

"At least I have two weeks more of a clean-shirt existence. That's that much."

There was in his mind a bitter distaste for the pretended omniscience of old Wheels, and with this was mingled a curious dislike, felt for the first time, of the realistic omniscience of Franz. He did not want to go to Central Branch next Friday to share Franz's triumph. That garret Uptopia had somehow lost its savour. It was more interesting to live in the real world in which one lost one's job and — yes, by God! — fought to get it back.

"Damn all these people who know everything!" he said.

XXXIII Accident

1

THE only residue of the emotional states through which Felix passed between Saturday afternoon and Monday morning, was a dull discouragement. He was given no assignments, apparently with the idea of leaving him free to look for other work. But he was too hopeless to engage in any such efforts, and his sense of habit led him through his accustomed routine.

At the undertaker's he found Deems Morgan. "I hear you're fired," said Deems cheerfully.

"Yes," said Felix.

Deems turned with a smile to the red-headed undertaker. "For insulting the Jews — what do you know about that!"

"For what!" said Felix.

"Sure — don't you know what you were fired for?"

"I was told," said Felix slowly, "that it was for incompetence."

"Incompetence me eye," said Deems. "It's something you wrote about the Jews; and old Rosenthal wouldn't stand for it. I got that at the *Record* from Parks, and he got it from the city editor. I think Groome told him. Anyway, it's straight."

"Impossible!" said Felix.— He, accused of writing something insulting about the Jews! "Why, it's absurd!"

But Deems was sure of it. "You'll find out," he said.

2

Felix went on to the railway station. So that was the sort of thing they were telling about him! But why?— Why? He simply could not understand. But it made him angry.

It was his anger that made him stand aloof in the station while it filled up with the outgoing crowd, and wait there motionless until the train had come and gone, without making an effort to get anybody's name. But the action had a curious effect upon him. He had a sense of leisure, and of power, as he sat there idly watching the crowd — instead of scurrying about from one group to another with paper and pencil. "I am trying out Deems' theory," he said to himself. "I'll loaf on the job today, just to see what it seems like."

After an hour or two he strolled into the office "to report." He had nothing whatever to show for his morning; but he was surprised to find himself not in the least ashamed. Then he strolled out again. He spent the afternoon in the same manner, going his rounds but not bothering about whether he got any "news" or not.

It was at least a refreshing experience, and the next day, indifferent and care-free, he walked into the station again, merely looking at people. He went back to the office, reported "nothing doing," and went home for his mid-day meal. He had not told Ed and Alice that he was fired; he would put that off as long as possible, to spare himself their sympathy. Alice asked him how the work was going, and he answered her with brazen mendacity that it was going fine!

And yet he did not feel as though that were a lie. . . .

He felt, oddly enough, more like a reporter that day than ever before!

He went back to the railway station. It was early, and there were only a few people there. But one group, a mother with a baby in her arms and two other children at her side, all of them sickly and pale, he remembered as having been there that morning. Felix looked at them curiously, wonderingly. He looked at them a long while. Then he went up to the woman.

"Have you had anything to eat today?" he asked.

An hour later Felix rushed into the office and leaned over

J. G.'s desk. "I've got a story," he said breathlessly. "At least, a sort of story. Human-interest stuff."

J. G. smiled at his enthusiasm and asked, "What is it?"

Felix told him in half a dozen sentences. "She's going back to Brookfield," he finished, "and it's only forty miles from here, and I thought it had a kind of local interest — ?"

"It has," said J. G. "Hop to it. You've just an hour before press-time."

"How — how much space can I have?"

J. G. looked at him gravely. "Seven columns!" he said.

Thrilled, Felix ran to his typewriter. "Seven columns" had no practical meaning — nobody could write seven columns in an hour. It was a symbol — it meant "all you can write!" He would be doing well if he wrote a column and a half. But the phrase was an accolade. "Seven columns!" He had brought in a good story. . . .

He knew every word of the story that he meant to write, and he was tapping off his last sentence (a sentence that had come into his mind, complete down to the last comma, as he was carrying one of those sick children to the train an hour before!) — at ten minutes over the dead-line, with J. G. standing at his shoulder saying "That's all — give me what you've got." He finished that preordained sentence, surrendered the sheet, and leaned back in his chair, exhausted and happy.

J. G. came back, and stopped by his desk a moment. "I always suspected," he said in a quizzical way, "that all you needed was a little interest in people, to make you a good reporter."

There were many implications in that remark. It suggested that Felix's newspaper career had not come to an end after all. But what Felix realized most fully was simply that J. G. had praised him. He did not even realize how mistaken, in a sense, the praise was. "Interest in people!" Felix had forgotten the woman, forgotten those death-shadowed children, forgotten the innocent maniac of a husband who had led her in that hopeless, ridiculous,

tragic quest across a continent, forgotten her infinite patience and absurd loyalty, except as figments of the dream which he had just recorded upon paper. They were not real to him, they never had been real — they were figures he had created, moving helplessly through a world of blind accident; they were pathetic with the lovely pathos of a poem. . . . Yet he felt as he had never felt when he had finished a poem — proud, uplifted, a master of the elusive shapes of dream.

"Anyway," he said to himself, "I have shown them!"

3

It was easy to find "human-interest stuff." He had only to look about, with a mind free from anxieties and from an exacting sense of duty, and follow the lead of his curiosity. There were stories everywhere! He turned in one or two every day. There were no more accolades, and twice J. G. cut his column to half its length. But he knew that he had "made good." And before the week was over J. G. casually said to him, in an interval when the others were talking loudly at the other side of the room, "I suppose you know you've got your job back?"

Afterward Felix remembered that "insulting the Jews" rumour. He ought to ask about it. But it seemed too ridiculous to mention. . . .

But toward the end of the second week, Vincent invited him out for a drink after a paper had gone to press. Felix wondered what was coming, for Vincent had the air of one who will presently confide a secret. "Felix," he said, when they had leaned against the mahogany bar, "do you remember that stuff I dictated to you a couple of weeks ago?"

Felix remembered. Vincent had cut his right forefinger, and had laboriously pounded out his stories all day with his left, and with a middle finger — for, like everybody else in the office, he used only two fingers in typewriting. But that unaccustomed middle finger would not hit the

right keys. After press time he was cursing over his typewriter as he worked, and at last Felix had asked him if he didn't want to dictate his copy. Vincent had acquiesced, and Felix had taken it down — on the bottom of a sheet containing some "personals" of his own, and with his name, as the custom was, in the upper left-hand corner. Vincent's copy was only two slight items of "lodge-news."

"Yes," said Felix. "Go on!" One of those items had had something to do with Jews. . . .

"Well, do you remember that stuff about the B'nai Brith excursion? You asked, what's the B'nai Brith, and I said, a benevolent association of Jews. Do you remember?"

"Yes." Evidently — but —!

"Well, you put it in just that way — the B'nai Brith, a benevolent association of Jews. I saw it at the time, but I neglected to cross it out."

Felix saw the point of Vincent's confession, but the crime remained a mystery. "Why *should* you have crossed it out?" he asked.

"Because it's a rule of the office not to call a man a Jew. Old Rosenthal thinks it's a reflection on his race. He says, you don't say that Michael Dougherty, an Irish pedlar, was arrested for not having a license, why should you ring in the Jew — Jew — Jew all the time? I can't quite see why it's an insult to call a Jew a Jew — but he does. I've heard him go on about it to J. G. I ought to have known better, but my finger was hurting me, and I forgot."

"So that's why I got fired?" said Felix.

"Sure. I understand that you didn't know the real reason, so I thought I'd put you wise. The old man went up in the air when he read it in the paper, and when he looked the thing up he found your name on the story. J. G. kind of stuck up for you, said you were new and didn't know any better, but old Rosenthal said he didn't think you were any good anyway. But it was nothing but that Jew

stuff. He certainly had it in for you. He kicked like a steer when J. G. insisted on your being taken back. But" — and Vincent tipped up his glass of beer, "he knows who did it now. Seeing you'd got your job back, I didn't want the old man to have a black mark against you. I told him today."

"That's fine of you," said Felix. "I suppose there's no danger of you're getting fired for it?"

"No," said Vincent winking over his glass. "There just isn't. Last night I signed a contract with the road company of 'The Girl in Pink,' as their advance agent, and I leave at the end of the week. Have another one on my new job!"

Felix laughed. So the absurdity had been the truth. Truly, this was a world of blind meaningless accident. . . . But what did it matter, so long as one rode triumphant on the foaming crest of chaos!

Book Four

The Cabin

XXXIV Education

I

TWO years later, Felix was still a reporter on the Port Royal *News:* still going to hear the Rabbi's sermons, and flirting with Mrs. Miller on the way home; and still going to Socialist meetings. Life had seemed to slow up; he had stopped seeking — he had found his place, and stayed in it.

And yet there had been changes. He had become the dramatic critic of the *News,* and he was getting eighteen dollars a week. Mrs. Miller had insensibly taught him some manners. And his visits to the Socialist local were only occasional.

He was not quite sure, now, that he was really a Socialist. Ideas, he realized, were different from realities; and he was living in the real world, and getting along very well.

He rather avoided his old friend Franz Vogelsang. Perhaps the reason was that he had adopted something — not too much — of the Franzian manner: the air of amused omniscience, the habit of saying with crushing finality some truth which others preferred to forget; and it was more agreeable to be another Franz than to remain Franz's disciple. The word in Port Royal for this kind of manner was "cynical"; it startled, made an impression, and, graced with the airs of gallantry acquired in association with Mrs. Miller, it was quite an agreeable social asset.

Felix's circle of friends had extended somewhat into the bourgeoisie, and he was at home in the houses of the friends of his friends. Helen had gone suddenly to another town to become librarian of a larger library, leaving him with a sense of having behaved ungratefully toward her. Emily

Ross had gone away to college. Wheels had lost his glamour. Clavering, the poet, had long since gone to Chicago. And Tom Alden, whom Felix had seen once or twice in the streets, had passed on absent-mindedly without returning Felix's greeting. His new friends, however pleasant, were not so exciting as these others had once been.

It was a small and ordered world in which Felix lived. It centred about his work on the newspaper, where a succession of small triumphs fed his egotism. He had begun to think of writing a novel, and at home in the evenings dreamed over a collection of "notes" which as yet refused to resolve themselves into a "plot." Ed and Alice were a kindly, accustomed and unconsidered background. And for the rest, his ambition seemed to find full scope in his friendships — particularly in the tantalizing and amusing quasi-friendship which he maintained with Mrs. Miller.

2

She had invited him to her home, after a playful description of it which was a warning that he would find it almost as intolerable as she did. Her husband was a banker, a red-faced, puffy man, who shared, it seemed, no interests whatever in common with her. And Felix was at first startled, and then entertained, by the insouciant way she would insult him, saying, "Freddie, go and read your paper — you wouldn't understand what Felix and I are talking about, anyway."

It was true, he didn't understand. And it became an amusing game to conduct such conversations before him until he fled from sheer boredom; but it was particularly amusing to flirt with her — in abstruse witticism and allusion — before his eyes. They said things which would have shocked the poor man to the marrow, if he had understood; they declared their (assumed for the occasion) undying and passionate love for each other, before him; they discussed him, and his attitude toward their imaginary case, and what

he would do about it if he could understand what they were saying at this very minute!

"It's a good thing, L. L.," he would say afterwards, "that I know your real motives. It's not that you like stray young men so much, but that you dislike — husbands." "L. L." was now his pet name for her.

It was amusing, and it was only mildly unsatisfactory, this purely verbal love-making. Perhaps it had become an art too precious to spoil by the intrusion of reality; and perhaps they did not really want to make love to each other. Sometimes, when they seemed to have exploited verbally to the last degree the existing state of their relationship, it seemed inevitable that they should break through the impalpable veil which separated them; but always some new elaboration of fancy kept them there, on the polite edge of intimacy.

Thus, at last it irked Felix's egotism to be always speaking of kisses and never getting one; but when he demanded the kiss, it was in a rondeau, and when she replied in a remarkably pretty villanelle, the delight of pursuing this episode of gallant versification contented him, and he wooed her in rhyme, with equivocal responses in the same terms. He soon forgot the annoyance which had spurred him to his original demand.

They were still versifying about that kiss nearly a year after it had first been broached.

But one night as they were walking home from "the Rabbits" in the August moonlight, she suddenly turned to him and said, "Felix, do you *really* want to kiss me?"

3

"Yes," he said, his heart fluttering.

"Of course," she said, "that is the only possible reply to such a question. But let's be honest. I'll start it by reminding you that I am thirty-five years old. You are twenty. Why should you want to kiss an old woman like me? It's perfectly natural that I should encourage you.

Women allow themselves to be kissed at every available — and intriguing — opportunity. They like it. But they don't take it seriously, and I'm afraid you do. You would. You don't know how trivial a thing a kiss is. And I wouldn't want to disappoint you."

"I don't think," said Felix, "that you would disappoint me."

"I should try to, Felix — in self-defence. It would be a cold and clammy kiss. You wouldn't like it. Go on and find some nice girl of your own age, and say some of the things to her that you've been saying to me. I've taught you to make love. Go and practise my lessons, and then come back and tell me that I was a good schoolmarm. I mean it. You will make a very successful lover, I think. Go!"

"No," said Felix. He wanted to take her at her word. He wanted to go. He was afraid. But because he was afraid, he must stay. "No," he repeated, and stopped.

They were in the shade of a great elm, a little way from her house. "All right, then," she said, in a changed voice, and lifted her face to his. They kissed, and it seemed that she became a little girl, and clung to him, shivering, trembling, and helpless. And yet her kiss was cold — cold and shy and afraid. For a moment only, it seemed, she really yielded her lips to him, and then she pushed him away.

They walked on. "That was a foolish thing for us to do," she said sadly. "You won't write any more poetry to me, Felix."

4

Felix knew that that was true. For a moment, realizing in that last speech of hers the truest emotion that had ever been expressed between them, he felt like a child who has wantonly broken a toy. He felt ashamed — ashamed of the hypocrisy which was making him pretend that he had any reason to break that toy. He wanted to take her hand

and say, "It's true. Let's just be friends again." But he couldn't. It was as if he must not admit that he was a child. He must go on pretending to be a man because she was a woman. . . .

"I forgot that there was such a thing as masculine pride," she was saying. "Now you'll want to finish your conquest. If you only knew how little there was to be proud of in that, Felix. Women yield themselves to men for a thousand reasons — in pity, or in curiosity, or in sheer boredom. It's a gift not worth having. You merely don't know. But you'll find out. It's not so hard to conquer a woman. Have you thought of that?"

"No," said Felix.

"I see it's no use arguing with you. Our pretty play is spoiled. We mustn't see each other any more."

"Why not?"

"Because. You know perfectly well why not. You don't love me, and I don't love you, and it would be silly if either of us did. But if we see each other any more, we shall get into a most awful mess. I hate messes." She shivered.

"Don't be afraid," said Felix.

"Thank you. But I know. If we see each other again, I warn you, Felix, I shall perhaps not refuse to kiss you. Doesn't that terrify you? Well, it terrifies me. This is going to stop right now."

"That is easy to say," protested Felix. "But you forget that you invited me to come over and meet some friends of yours tomorrow evening."

"I'm glad you spoke of that. Because I had forgotten to tell you. It's off. The people can't come."

"Can't I come?"

"No — you can't. Because I shall be absolutely alone in the house all evening. My husband is out of town. Don't come!"

And she ran swiftly toward the house.

Felix's heart sank. She would be alone. He would have to come. "Don't!"—That meant, "I shall expect you!" It was to be his hour. . . . But he felt strangely unlike a successful lover as he walked home.

XXXV Reversion to Type

I

EARLY the next morning, as Felix was just about to leave the office, a man came in and asked for him. He was a small, stoop-shouldered man, whom Felix had seen somewhere before. He introduced himself as Wilfrid Endicott. He wanted to see "Mr. Fay" in regard to a new free-thought society which was just being formed. — Then Felix remembered: he was one of the men whom he had seen in the meeting in the "Art Gallery" four years ago! He listened gravely, but with an undercurrent of amusement, while the little man explained the purposes of the new society. He made a note or two on his pad, but when he asked further questions, it appeared that the organization was in too nebulous a stage of existence to warrant even the smallest item of news. He tactfully suggested that Mr. Endicott keep him in touch with the affairs of the society, and when there was an election of officers or something, he would be glad to run a little story about it. Until then —

Mr. Endicott hunched his chair a little nearer to Felix's desk, and his voice, already modulated to the discreet tone in which one speaks of treasons, stratagems and spoils, sank to a hoarse whisper. "I thought — that is, we thought — that you yourself would be interested in the organization. You could be of a great deal of assistance to us, of course. If you would care to attend our first meeting —"

Felix smiled, and shook his head. His smile was indulgent, as for the follies of youth. How far away and long ago did that meeting at the "Art Gallery" seem! And that feverish hunt for the Socialist meeting-place! Yes, those

were interesting, if rather pathetic, days; but they were over. Attending "free-thought" meetings, save as a matter of gathering news, was not a part of his present program. He turned to his visitor.

"I used to attend meetings all the time," he said laughingly. "I guess I attended so many of them that I surfeited myself. Anyway, I can hardly bear to go into a hall any more. It's the hardest thing in the world for me to do. I'd rather not."

Mr. Endicott rose. "I'm sorry," he said. "Some of our members thought you would be interested. Mr. Alden — Mr. Thomas Alden — suggested your name."

"Tom Alden?"

"Yes. Mr. Thomas Alden, the writer. He was very anxious that you should be notified of the meeting. He said he would come and see you about it himself if I didn't have time. He told us we could count on you absolutely as a member."

"Tom Alden!" Felix's mind went back to those old days when he had briefly — and all too slightly — known Tom Alden. He had never let himself know how much he had liked Tom Alden; because it was so obvious that Tom cared nothing about him. He had really been hurt when, afterward, Tom had passed him with unseeing absent-minded eyes, in the street. He had dismissed Tom as part of an episode in his past life, in which, as he remembered it, he himself had cut a rather absurd and pitiful figure. . . . But now that Tom remembered him, he realized that he wanted to see Tom Alden again very much.

"When is the meeting? I think I'll drop in," he said.

"Tonight." And Mr. Endicott gave him the address. "We will meet to organize in my house," he said apologetically. "Later, when we find out how many members we have, we can make proper provisions. . . ."

He was gone, and Felix looked after him, seeing in memory the tall, kindly figure of Tom Alden.— But tonight! He had forgotten; in spite of an almost sleepless night of

anticipation and grim resolve, he had forgotten! Tonight was L. L.'s.

And into his mind there flashed, like an excuse for escaping an unwilling duty, the memory of her last words the night before. "Don't come!" He smiled grimly. "It would serve her just right if I didn't!" he said to himself. Nevertheless, of course he would go. There must be some way to reconcile this conflict of engagements. He might go early to Mrs. Miller's (she was Mrs. Miller in his mind now, and not L. L.) and then go —

Oh, how ridiculous! He had got it twisted. He meant that he could go early to the meeting, and get away in time to call on Mrs. Miller. . . . The idea of calling on her so late as that was not exactly practicable. Suppose he 'phoned to her and suggested that they go to the meeting together? The idea appealed to him, though he realized faintly that there was an element of the preposterous in it. Well, then —

But before he could solve the problem, he had to turn his attention to an assignment. And in spite of some confused thought upon it from time to time during the day, it was still unsolved when the hour came to go — either to the meeting, or to Mrs. Miller's.

Fortunately, the same street led past Mrs. Miller's to the meeting place, so he was not obliged to make an instant choice. "If I go," he said to himself, "she'll have a housefull of people there. It will be just like her. And it would serve me right, for being such a fool." But he would go just the same. He could explain to Tom Alden afterward. It was not necessary for him to be at this meeting. And anyway, he hated meetings. It would be sure to be a bore. Probably Tom Alden would think better of it and stay away, himself. He, Felix, was not interested in "free-thought." He had had enough of that sort of thing. It was all foolishness. What was Tom Alden doing, getting himself mixed up in that stuff? What had Tom been doing all this time? He had not published anything since that first book

of his. Would his wife be there with him? Felix had never quite liked her. But — what was it? — some faint memory of a remark, heard a year ago —" the Aldens don't get along very well." In fact hadn't Mrs. Miller intimated something about a separation? Curious. . . . Certainly they had seemed fond enough of each other three years ago. . . .

He remembered how, each of the two times he had gone to see Tom Alden, he had been kept in the drawing-room for half an hour each time, Mrs. Alden entertaining him while Tom " finished a chapter." She had the air of guarding him. Felix had rather resented it. If Tom Alden was busy, he was perfectly willing to go, and come again some other time. But no, he could be seen in half an hour. Felix had wondered how she could know that he would be ready to quit work in half an hour. But she was brilliantly certain of her ground. She had promised to produce him in a certain time, and when the time was up, she went and got him. He came in, apparently a little bewildered, and Felix was made still more embarrassed by the conviction that he had been wrenched away in the middle of a sentence. But Tom Alden's wife had no such fears. She was the guardian of his sacred labours — that was plain. If Tom Alden had little or nothing to say in reply to Felix's feverish attempts to make conversation, then it must have been Felix's fault. She would stay a minute or two, and then go away saying, " Now I will leave you two together to talk." It was a precious interval, and they must make the most of it — Tom Alden in giving literary aid and comfort, and Felix in receiving it. The only trouble was, they found they had nothing to say to each other!

Well; so it had happened. He had liked Tom, too. It would be nice to see him again; and perhaps this time they could hit it off a little better. That is, if Tom were really on hand at that meeting. Which of course implied that he, Felix, would also be on hand. Well, he could come late — that is, early. . . . No, damn it, he couldn't come at all.

Not to the meeting. He was going to Mrs. Miller's. To L. L.'s. Yes. Tonight —

He pulled up short, realizing that he had gone three blocks beyond Mrs. Miller's house.

He whirled on his heel, looked back, turned, and looked forward. Then, with an awkward laugh and a great sense of relief, he strode on toward the meeting.

"I hope she waits — and waits — and waits," he said to himself vindictively.

(But Mrs. Miller didn't wait and wait and wait; she had strolled over to the Rabbits, where she thought Felix, after knocking on her door, would probably come too — and the game would go on indefinitely. She liked Felix — in a verbal way — very much; and if she couldn't get some more poems out of him, then it would mean that she was *really* getting old!)

2

A dozen assorted free-thinkers sat around the large dinner-table in the Endicott home. And Tom Alden was among them. Coffee and cakes were served, and various people said various things. Felix at first was scornful, and a little puzzled by the presence of Tom Alden there among those people. That was during the first ten minutes. For those first ten minutes he was Felix Fay, the young reporter of the Port Royal *News*. But presently, without realizing it, he ceased to be that enterprising and realistic person, and became another Felix Fay — the incorrigible Utopian. Dreams, long repressed, began to flower in his mind. He forgot to despise these people, he became one with them in their hopes and plans.

But there was something, nevertheless, about the talk that evening that he did not like; and at last, when he was called upon for his opinion, he said: "I don't want to fight old battles. The struggle for free thought has been waged and won. The question now is, what shall we think? You speak of Science, of Darwinism, of Evolution; and you seem

to me to be speaking of the theory that the earth is round. Let us stand for some theory that has a challenge in it."

"What do you suggest?" asked Endicott respectfully.

"You are right." It was Tom Alden, who had been brooding silently, hardly saying a word. "I want something that cuts under the old controversies. Beyond good and evil, as it were."

"Yes?" said Endicott, encouragingly.

"Haeckel has a word that pleases me," said Felix. "Monism."

"It pleases me too," said Tom Alden thoughtfully. "In its philosophic implications."

The others vanished from Felix's consciousness, and he was talking only to Tom Alden. "We live in a world," he said, "in which people are fooled by our dualistic habits of language. We think in terms of pairs of opposites. Day-and-night seems a reality, and heat-and-cold; so why not good-and-bad? It's a primitive way of thinking; but it isn't true. The world isn't like that."

"Sliced up into neat little categories," nodded Tom Alden, equally forgetful of the rest, and speaking only to Felix. "Balanced! Heaven and hell! Chaste and unchaste women! It's just a logomachy — a war of words."

"The universe isn't two things," said Felix. "It's one thing. Let's assert that. Monism!"

"Good!" said Tom Alden. "The Monist Society." He fell into thought again, and Felix became conscious of the outer world. Endicott was saying:

"I'm sure we all agree that the name proposed by Mr. Alden is an admirable one. And I think we should appoint Mr. Alden and Mr. Fay a committee to draw up a manifesto for the new society, to be read at our first regular meeting in Turner Hall next Thursday week, to which, I may say again, we have the promise of the attendance of seventy-two members!"

There was a murmur of applause around the table, and then Mrs. Endicott came in with more food and drink, and

the party began to break up. Tom Alden was immersed in absent thought, from which he awoke suddenly as Felix came up to bid him good night. "It's early," he said, "come on over to my place for a while."

Felix gladly assented.

3

"Do you know Mrs. Miller?" Felix asked, as they passed her house.

Tom looked across the lawn at the lighted windows. "Lulu? Yes — and that reminds me. I had intended to ask her to this meeting. Let's go in and tell her about it, and get her to come to the one in Turner Hall."

"Would she be interested in — in Monism?" asked Felix.

"Sort of," said Tom. "Amused, anyway. It will be fun to tell her."

Mrs. Miller welcomed Tom with a cry of delight. "Why, Tommy," she said, drawing them into the house, "I haven't seen you for years and years."

"Fact!" said Tom.

"I suspect you've come around to convert me to something. What is it this time? It was the Ego and His Own last time, I believe. You were disappointed in me, weren't you, Tommy? But I did everything the book said. If you only knew!"

Tom smiled. "Cast out of your soul all the old rubbish?"

"Rubbish if you want to call it that. All my best furniture, say I. All the lovely old antiques. It was heart-breaking! But I did it. I threw them all out. The front yard of my soul was just littered with them."

"And when you were finished, and your soul was naked and clean — ?"

"And cold, Tommy. Cold and shivery and bare. Why then I just went out in the yard and carried them back, one by one. And here they are again, just as before. But I

won't say my soul isn't the better for that — housecleaning! What will you have, Tommy? Bourbon or Scotch? Felix doesn't know what he is drinking, anyway."

Over the glasses, Tom told her about the new society. She laughed. "I knew it! You are your old self again. And will I come to the meeting? You can't keep me away. You are the funniest person I know. The Moonist Society. With you and Felix as the Grand Chief Moonists. It's perfectly lovely. . . ."

It was late when they left, and Tom said, "I suppose you have to go to work in the morning. I've got in the habit of sitting up all night myself."

"This is Saturday night," said Felix.

"Oh! Well, come on over, and we'll have an all-night talk! I've got some beautiful Amontillado over in my garret that I haven't found any one worthy to drink up with me. We'll plan our manifesto — the Manifesto of the Moonist Society!"

XXXVI Statistics

I

THE garret was the same one in which Felix had been before, on the occasion of his first social encounter with Tom Alden and his friends. But the place was changed. It had been transformed into a kind of writing room — utterly unlike the neat and orderly "den" which Felix had glimpsed on two subsequent occasions as Tom emerged from it to talk with him. The floor was littered with old newspapers, books and crumpled writing-paper. The table at which Tom wrote was covered with tobacco and ashes, and there were eight corncob pipes visible. There was a couch, which apparently served as a bed, and which had been hastily and amateurishly "made" by flinging a great piece of ragged tapestry over its lumpy surface. It was a place into which, obviously, no woman had come for months. It was the kind of place into which a man who has been spoiled by women until he is unable to look after himself, flees from their tiresome ministrations — a dirty and happy refuge.

Tom Alden, entering, kicked a bathrobe that lay on the floor into the nearest corner, flung a soiled shirt after it, looked around the room for the wine, discovered it on a long bookshelf between two volumes of Nietzsche, rummaged for clean glasses, sat down, poured out two tumblers of wine, and then, happening to catch sight of a piece of paper on his desk, picked it up and stared at it thoughtfully. "I nearly forgot to come to the meeting tonight," he said, "I was writing this."

He continued to gaze at it, and Felix came around and

looked over his shoulder. It was entitled "Girls," but it was not an ordinary-looking piece of writing. After a short paragraph, ending abruptly in the middle of a sentence, it contained a list of names and initials. To one side, these names and initials were marshalled in groups, with explanatory but undecipherable remarks attached to each group. Underneath, the groups were analyzed into sub-groups, with Greek letters, mathematical and algebraic signs, stars, double stars, crosses, and unknown hieroglyphics to distinguish them. The page ended with a series of mysterious tables, in which the signs and hieroglyphics were apparently arranged in some kind of mysterious sequence. . . .

"It looks like a statistical study," laughed Felix.

Tom Alden put the paper down abruptly. "It is," he said. He lifted his glass. "Here's to the Very Improbable She!"

They drank, and Tom continued. "Instinct doesn't work. Not in matters of love. So I've been trying to use reason. I've been trying to review my experiences with girls, to see if I have really learned anything about them — and myself. It seemed to me, when I wrote all those names down, that I had quite a lot of data to go upon. But —"

He frowned, and refilled his glass. "Perhaps women are like the Universe, Felix. Perhaps there is only one kind of woman. It's a discouraging thought."

"Perhaps it's humanity that is monistic," said Felix. "Perhaps the trouble is that we try to think that men and women are opposed categories."

"I can't make them out," pondered Tom Alden. "Nor myself, for that matter." He absently took up the nearest pipe, lighted it, and wandered to the couch. "No sooner am I free from one impossible relationship than I try my damndest to get into another which the cynicism born of failure tells me will be just as bad. Of course I don't believe it. And of course this statistical study, as you call it, is merely an attempt to reassure myself. I know what I want. It may be impossible to get, but it is not impossible

to imagine. I don't want to be tied hand and foot; and I don't want a succession of light loves. I want an enduring love that is free — absolutely free. That means something to me, if to nobody else." He was silent a while, smoking, and then rousing himself suddenly, smiled and said to Felix, "What do you think?"

2

"My demands are much simpler than that," laughed Felix. "I merely want a girl that can be talked to, and that can be kissed. And I want it to be the same girl. So far it doesn't work out that way. I might match your statistics with some of mine as dramatic critic. You know I get two seats to every play, and I usually take a girl along. Sometimes I take an intellectual young woman, and sometimes a kissable one — and I don't find either type satisfactory."

"That's a startingly juvenile statement," said Tom Alden. "Why in the world should you not regard intellectual young women as kissable?"

"I don't know," confessed Felix. "But the fact is, I like the others better. Perhaps my tastes are vulgar. I am more at home with them — I feel freer. But when I sit beside them in the theatre, and hear them laugh at silly jokes, and feel their lack of appreciation of something a little subtle, I — well, I despise them."

"Perhaps it is the quality of Port Royal feminine intellectuality that freezes you," mused Tom. "I can understand that. There's the kind that's been to college, and learned the right things, and read the proper books, and rehearsed the correct opinions; she's absolutely confident of her rightness about everything; but she ends every discussion just where it ought to begin. Then there's the terribly idealistic kind; a little afraid to touch the rough edges of life, or of ideas. They want to believe the best of things and people; which means that they have prejudged what is

best. Their tolerance isn't real tolerance; it's timidity. And then there's the cynical woman, who still believes in the things she mocks; at least, she's afraid to believe in anything else. . . . Yes, I can see that if you're cooped up here in Port Royal, you might find the unintellectual kind a relief. . . . But Felix, there is a world outside of Port Royal!"

He fell to musing again, and Felix, ashamedly anxious to obliterate the impression he had given of the juvenility of his point of view, hastily ransacked his memory for some experience that had a more adult flavour. But he realized that all his experiences had been precisely that — juvenile. He thought for a moment of telling Tom about his "affair" with Lulu Miller — effectually disguising the identity of the lady, of course; but he realized that that was the most juvenile of them all. The kisses he had exchanged with the stenographer last week on the roller coaster at the Island were more real than all those rondeaus, and not a whit more lacking in any kind of significance.

"It's true," he said, thinking aloud. "My attitude is juvenile. Perhaps I am — really — afraid of girls. Of course, every young man pretends to be very wicked. So do I, when I am with them. I don't know whether they are lying or not, but I am. Perhaps I'm really a Puritan. But I can't help taking those things very seriously. I want real love, and I want a real girl to be in love with."

"And you live in Port Royal," mused Tom. "That is a hard fate. Well, let's have some more wine, and maybe it will throw light on the problem. . . . You know, Felix, you are very different in some ways from what I was at your age, and yet curiously the same. I wonder if that was why I sort of didn't like you when I first knew you? You reminded me of something strained and unhappy in my own early youth. Something I suppose I wanted to forget. I was successful and happy then, and I wanted to believe that I always would be so and always had been. But I think

you've become more human in the last couple of years, too. — Or perhaps I have become less human. My friends think so. They think I need some creature not too bright and good for human nature's daily food, to regulate my meals for me and remind me to shave and change my collar — in fact, a new wife. I don't think so. I think I know what I want. I want — Shall I show you something I've been writing?"

He rummaged among the barricade of papers on his desk and drew forth a manuscript and read it. . . . It was a dithyramb, not a story; a prose-poem, that presently left behind the trammels of realistic fact, and soared into the lonely heights of prophecy. It was wild, chaotic, and at times only half intelligible to Felix. But it appealed to something in him deeper than the powers of conscious cerebration which he had at first bewilderedly brought to bear upon it. For it awoke old memories, childhood experiences buried under the debris of years — his mother bending above him in the sick-bed — the "opera-house" in Maple, and his vision of a wild girl-creature swinging through the air upon a trapeze — his forgotten playmate of the garret and the woods. . . . It evoked these memories, these pictures, as music can; and it carried him into strange, but not untrodden regions of emotion, where he had lived for a time when he first made poems on his lonely walks at night. He was again what he had ceased for a while to be, or to seem, the lonely, unhappy, desperately desiring and bewildered child. . . .

3

They talked, after that, of books, and ideas, and Nietzschean philosophy, and women. They talked all night, and at dawn, still wakeful in spite of the bottle of Amontillado and another of claret, they went out in search of an all-night restaurant where they could get a breakfast of ham and eggs. Then they walked up the long hill to Vander-

decken park in the cool morning air, and went back to the garret. . . . There were still so many things to be talked about. . . .

XXXVII The Quest

1

THE first regular meeting of the Monist society was duly held in Turner Hall, and there were some fifty people present; among them, as a highly amused spectator, Mrs. Miller. Felix and Tom Alden both read documents which were in some sort manifestoes of the new society. It got half a column in each of the daily papers. After that, it either lived or died, but Felix and Tom did not trouble themselves to find out. They could talk to each other better without the accompanying presence of the fifty-odd members of the Monist society.

They became inseparable. Felix's evenings were all spent in Tom's garret, where Tom would generally lie on the couch, puffing in the intervals of philosophic disquisition on one of his eight corn-cob pipes. Their talk centred always upon what Tom called the Girl Question; they discussed it from the scientific, the Socialistic, the Anarchistic, the Nietzschean, the biological, and the experimental-opportunist points of view. Mrs. Miller mocked them gaily when, upon her invitation, they dined with her; they absented themselves, she said, from the world of women because they were misogynists; but they could not dispense with women entirely, so they talked about them all the time. A cowardly thing to do, she said, when they could not talk back!

They not only talked about girls, but in pursuance of the experimental-opportunist method, they went forth to study them in their lairs. Tom, with what Felix called his "passion for statistics," wrote down the name of every girl in town that he knew or had heard of, and discussed their possibilities as friends, sweethearts, and companions; and when

nine-tenths of them had been stricken from the list, they looked up the others, entered into diplomatic relations with them, and went to call upon them. They confided their program to Mrs. Miller, and she laughed hysterically. "You two will be the death of me yet!" she declared. "Bouvard and Pecuchet in Port Royal! How I do wish I could write a story about you." But she gave them the names of various "eligible" young women, and remarked that after all they had only come by a roundabout and philosophic method to a time-honoured and perfectly conventional kind of behaviour. "If only Felix would learn to play bridge and get a suit of evening clothes, you two would be the social success of the season!"

After each call, or dinner-party, they came home together and discussed the merits of the fair ones under consideration; the decision was invariably adverse, but some kind of social life was doubtless necessary to them, and the philosophic aftermath made it less boring than it would otherwise have been.

But these scientific experiments and observations were, early in the spring, suddenly interrupted.

2

Felix's position as dramatic critic did not mean that he did any less of the ordinary work of a reporter; he had been relieved of the duty of "making the trains" and visiting the undertakers since a new "cub" had appeared in the office, but he continued to visit the postoffice, the weather-bureau, the banks, and a number of lawyers' offices in quest of "news." One of these offices, which occupied a palatial suite of rooms in the Nugent Building, was that of Nugent, Bassett and Ward, the town's most prosperous law-firm. Bassett was "the man to see" there — James F. Bassett, the busiest but the most approachable lawyer in town. He liked to talk to young reporters, even when he did not have anything to give them except a funny story and a cigar; and Felix always waited for him unless the girl at the desk

said that it was no use. He did not mind waiting, because he liked Bassett, with his bluff, hearty familiarity. Bassett had a way of finding out everything about you, and "kidding" you about it. He had found out from Felix that he was interested in writing, and was always asking him if he had commenced "the great American novel" yet. He also knew that Felix had taken the girl at the desk in front to the theatre, and he would gravely make inquiries about the progress of "the amour," and shake his head at the timidity of the younger generation. "Why, at your age, my boy, I would have carried that girl off and married her and had a family started by this time! It doesn't do to be so slow. You remember what happened to Polly!"

Polly was the previous occupant of the desk, with whom Felix had also been charmed; Felix had missed her one day, and been informed that she had quit, and was going to be married to an automobile salesman. "You missed your chance!" Bassett said, rolling his big cigar in the corner of his mouth. "You're too slow. You'll have to work faster than that with Lucy here!"

Lucy, her successor, was another reason why Felix did not mind waiting around for James F. Bassett. Lucy was nicer even than Polly, and she had almost survived his reaction to her at the silly play where she had giggled and cried, like everybody in the theatre except Felix. . . . He almost believed Basset was in earnest in wanting him to marry one of those girls. "Nothing like getting married when you are young," he had said. "Look at me. Got five children, and 'm the happiest man on earth!" Felix had ventured, half seriously, to remark that a young reporter's salary was not anything to get married on, and Bassett had laughed. "Leave that to her," he said. "What she spends you'll earn, all right. You'll have to! A young fellow that isn't married doesn't need any money. He'd just waste it if he had it. But a girl that's got anything to her knows how to make a man earn money, never you worry!" . . . Well, there was doubtless some-

thing to that; Lucy would probably make a success of the man she married; but somehow Felix didn't want to be made a success of by Lucy. He could not forget that she had cried at that silly play. . . .

But one Saturday morning, in the first teasing days of spring, when he walked into Nugent, Bassett and Ward's waiting-room, there was another girl at the desk. At first he saw only the sunlight making a dazzling nimbus around the edges of her careless yellow hair. He stopped suddenly. She looked up, and their eyes met.

3

With a great effort, he put on an exceedingly casual air, and came up to her desk. She looked down at her typewriting machine.

He asked if Mr. Bassett was busy, and was told that he was very busy. He was in an important conference. That meant that there was no chance of seeing him today, and Felix should have gone. But he did not go. He stayed and talked. He asked what had become of Lucy, and heard that she was ill. Not that he cared what had happened to Lucy. He only wanted to talk.

She apparently did not mind. Or rather, she did *appear* to mind; she appeared to be slightly annoyed by the persistent and frivolous conversation of this strange young man. He was saying nothing in particular with an amused and personal air; "kidding," it was called. And she was apparently just enough amused to keep her from brusquely sending him about his business. It was the usual feminine defence to the ordinary masculine attack; it meant, "If you stay here, you do so on your own responsibility — I'm not encouraging you!" But there was something more in her manner, that lit her face, and informed every gesture, and filled the situation with an electrical excitement. She was keeping — or trying to keep — a secret: the secret that they had read in each other's eyes in that first moment when he came in the door and their eyes met. If Felix had not been

analyzing his emotions so much lately, he would have stayed and talked just the same; but he might not have consciously known what happened in that first moment. Now he knew. It was a beautiful and terrible thing; and he too was keeping — or trying to keep — that secret, as he bantered jocularities with her. That instant in which their eyes met had not been a fleeting speck of time; it had been a moment out of the world of ticking clocks, a moment in which they had seen each other with clairvoyant vision, not as strangers, but as belonging irrevocably to each other; in that glance, she was his, and he hers; and they knew it.

"Haven't you got anything else to do?" she asked at last, with apparent impatience, sticking another sheet of paper into her typewriter.

"Yes," he said, glancing at the clock, "and it will take me just about an hour to do it. By that times James F. will be ready to close up the office, and go golfing." It was Saturday. "And then I want you to go for a walk with me."

"Hmp," she said. "Is that all?"

"Oh, no. I want your whole afternoon. The walk is just the beginning. But we can plan what to do as we go along."

She smiled coolly. "You have your nerve," she said, and commenced to write. But Felix knew from the way her fingers touched the keys that she was only writing over and over, "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party."

"I shall wait for you," he said, "at one o'clock sharp, down in the lobby by the cigar counter. We can eat lunch either before we walk or afterward, just as we feel like."

"You can wait — anywhere you like," she said serenely, and went on writing.

"At one o'clock, remember," he said, and went out. She did not look up. But he knew she would be there.

XXXVIII The Girl

I

HE was so sure that she would be there, that in the five minutes while he waited at the cigar-counter for the minute hand of the lobby clock to reach its appointed place, he let his fancy range unrestrained. He built castles in the air; and the little corner of his brain which looked on while he did so was not so much cynical as sheerly surprised at the nature of the castles that he built. For they were conventional, to say the least. They were entirely such as Jim Bassett himself would have approved. . . . He saw himself and her in a little cottage in the suburbs, with a garden behind it; he was digging in the garden — he who hated gardening! — digging and planting and hoeing the ground that was to bear food for them. And presently out of the house she came, with her yellow hair all touseled, and an apron tied around her waist, to call him in to the dinner that she had cooked. And there were babies. . . . Wherever he went in that dream-cottage he saw them — in her arms, playing on the floor. . . . He lit a cigarette, and the corner of his brain which was looking on, spoke. "Are you thinking of getting married, Felix?" He puffed at the cigarette, blew out a cloud of smoke, and answered himself, not without surprise, "Yes, by God, I am!" Then he threw his cigarette away, and looked impatiently at the clock. It was one o'clock.

And then she came. They met like old friends, and decided to postpone their lunch until they had walked up an appetite. "We'll go up through Vanderdecken Park. It's beginning to be beautiful."

"But don't you have to work on Saturday afternoon?" she asked, as they swung off up the hill.

"Yes," he said. "I am taking you along. I'm going to write the spring story about Vanderdecken Park. And then I'm going to the Island. This is the opening day of the season. And I'm going to write a story about that."

"The Island?" she said. "I've never been there. What is it like?"

"An amusement park," he said. "We'll be children, and ride in the chute-the-chute —'n' ever'thing!"

"What fun!"

Their secret remained untold, while they walked the length and breadth of the Park, and saw the flowers budding on the warm slopes and in the greenhouses, and interviewed the old gardener. Felix had gone away from the office without any clear picture of her in his mind, remembering nothing with any certainty except that first tell-tale look in her eyes. Now his first impression of her was a delight in her free boyish stride, and a sharp pleasure in the way her floppy straw hat framed her face; he remembered that the hair underneath was a glorious yellow; he saw that her nose was snub, and he felt that he had never realized the beauty of a snub nose before. Her face was round, and she had a baby mouth. It was a type of beauty to which many men before Felix had fallen captive, but Felix felt it as a new discovery. She glowed with health and life; she was charming. He loved her.

After they had explored the park, and eaten lunch in the Park restaurant, they took the trolley for the Island.

"And this," said she, "is what you call work!"

He had demanded her name; it was Joyce Tennant. She told him she already knew his. "I asked my — my Boss who that fresh kid from the newspaper was."

"He probably thought you meant the fellow from the *Record*," said Felix. "I'll bet he told you Deems Morgan."

"No he didn't. He told me Felix Fay. And he said —" But she stopped.

"Well, what did he say?"

"Oh, you know how he talks! — you can imagine what he said."

"What was it?"

"Never mind!"

They rode on the roller coaster, and he kissed her as they went slowly through the dark passage after the breathless descent. When they came to the end of the ride, he said, "Let's stay on," and they repeated the ride, and the kiss. A third time. . . . It was strange, he felt, as they emerged, that this cool and indifferent-seeming girl could be the same who had given her lips to him in the darkness so fearlessly, so devoutly. She was denying now what she had told him then with her kiss; but he knew that it was true. . . .

They dined in the park, and danced in one of the pavilions, and wandered among the merry-making crowds, saying little — because the only thing that mattered did not need saying. At last she said, "Take me home."

Felix hardly noticed where they were going as they got off the street car in Port Royal and walked along the quiet dark streets. He was wondering — should he ask her to go with him to the play Monday night? He decided not to. But he did, suddenly, when she stopped on the sidewalk in front of her house and put out her hand a little formally in farewell.

"Why, yes," she said. "I'd like to. Hadn't you better take the address? I don't believe you've the slightest notion where you are."

He scribbled it down, and walked homeward. "I'm afraid I've spoiled it," he said to himself. "She won't like Bernard Shaw, and I'll not like her any more. . . . Damn Shaw! If I have vulgar tastes, why should that old vegetarian interfere?"

2

He did not have time on Monday to stop at Bassett's office; and besides, he was afraid that a second meeting with his beloved might destroy some of the illusion which still intoxicated him. He half regretted that he was to see her that evening, though he was determined not to let any intellectual snobbishness keep him from liking her, if she still seemed as nice as before. He was intent upon these thoughts when he crossed the lawn, strode up the steps and rang the bell at the number she had given him. He had merely time enough to be a little startled at the imposing air of the entrance, and to wonder briefly if he had not made a mistake, when the door opened, and a white-aproned maid appeared before him. "I beg your pardon," he said. "Is this"—he referred to the number and stated it. "Yes, sir," said the maid.

"Is Miss Tennant in? Miss Joyce Tennant?"

"Yes, sir. Who shall I say—"

"Mr. Fay," said Felix.

Her gesture at the door invited him into the hall. "Will you wait a minute?" And she went through the curtains. There was a murmur of voices, and the next moment the curtains parted again, disclosing the burly form of James F. Bassett.

"How do you do, Felix?" said James F. Bassett, holding out his hand to Felix with a quizzical smile. "My niece will be ready in a moment. Come in the library and have a cigar with me while she's primping."

Dazed, Felix followed him.

XXXIX Explanations

I

FELIX need not have been so terribly impressed. He had not intruded into a palace. The Bassett house was merely large and comfortable. The Oriental rug on which he had stood during those few bewildered moments in the hall was quite the grandest thing about the place. When the Bassett children had become a little older, their father would be compelled to adapt his standard of living to their sense of what was due to their social position; the eldest of them, a girl in high school, was just beginning to pester him to buy a car. But these Babylonian tastes were as yet but in the bud. Even the maid, whose appearance at the door had so paralyzed Felix, was not exclusively dedicated to such appearances; she had been washing up the dinner-dishes, and had hastily donned for the occasion the white apron which was kept for such emergencies hanging on a nail behind the kitchen door; and it was merely in deference to Felix's shyness that Mr. Bassett had taken him to the library, rather than to the big living-room at the end of the hall, where the earliest of three high-school boys who had been promised a plate of fudge was sitting at the piano trying to pick out the notes of a popular tune, and "the twins" were quarrelling with each other over the respective merits of their newest electric toys. There was nothing socially oppressive about the atmosphere of the Bassett home.

Nevertheless, it was not what Felix had expected.

While James F. Bassett was inquiring Felix's views on the political situation (and, in default of any rational reply, urbanely giving his own), Felix was thinking furiously.

So Joyce was not a stenographer after all! . . . She had merely come down for the day — for a lark, perhaps. And he (silly, blundering fool) had taken her for a working-girl. What a joke it must have seemed to her. A stenographer's Saturday afternoon at an amusement park! . . . He burned with shame.

Who was she? He remembered that she had not known what the Island was. She must be a stranger in Port Royal. Probably there visiting her cousins. She would tell them about her adventure: he could hear in fancy their appreciative giggles. Had she already told her uncle? Felix looked sharply at that affable person, but he could not guess. James F. Bassett's manner was that of the perfect host. What ironic mockery lay beneath its easy geniality, Felix could only uncomfortably try to imagine. . . .

But why had the girl accepted his invitation to go to the theatre?

Did she want to exhibit her victim to amused and incredulous relatives? Or was it merely in order to reveal her identity to him, and enjoy his discomfiture? Yes, that must be it. Otherwise, why prolong the joke?

Well, she would get little satisfaction out of him on that score.

He would ask her point-blank, "Why have you been masquerading as a stenographer?" . . . But in fancy he could hear her cool reply, "So it was because you thought I was a stenographer that you were so familiar, was it?"

He might have known that she was a masquerader. . . . No real stenographer would have behaved as she had done! She would have been much more ladylike. Did he not know how stenographers behaved the first time they were out with a young man! Afterward, perhaps — but she would not have let him kiss her that first day. . . . He wished he could tell her that!

James F. Bassett had just finished a picturesque anecdote intended to throw light on the political character of Theo-

dore Roosevelt, when there was a little cry, "I'm coming!" and Joyce entered.

Both of the men stood up, and Felix looked at her with a hard and hostile gaze. She was wearing a soft blue dress and a very wide hat. Felix said to himself that she was intolerably dressed-up. Really he could not help thinking that she was terribly pretty. He had been prepared to see a different person — the niece of James F. Bassett. This girl was still somehow very like the one he had played with two days before — disarmingly so.

"Am I awfully late?" she asked.

"Plenty of time," said her uncle, looking her up and down, and giving her a pat of approval. "What's the play?"

"Arms and the Man," said Felix.

"A musical comedy, eh?" commented James F. Bassett, ushering them benevolently to the door.

2

Out on the steps Joyce giggled. Felix had been smiling grimly at her uncle's remark about the play, and it suddenly occured to him that she was laughing at the same thing. He was prepared, in his uncertain frame of mind, to believe anything of her now: and a new conception of her leaped dazzingly into his mind — a girl who had read Shaw and kissed young men in amusement-parks in the conscious knowledge that she was obeying the urge of the Life Force!

He stole a timid sidewise glance. There *was* something splendid about her!

Had he, then, made the great discovery? Was this that Very Improbable She, whom one could kiss on the roller-coaster and yet talk to at a Shaw play? The thought was almost terrifying. Had romance in its most modern terms come to him in Port Royal, after all?

He envisaged himself and her, in one breathless visionary moment, as hero and heroine of a super-Shavian epic — a twentieth-century Ferdinand Lassalle and Helene

von Racowitza! The dalliance of the eagles! . . . He looked at her again. She did not seem quite so modern as all that. She looked, truth to tell, more like a pretty girl in her prettiest dress, going to a party. And yet there was something free and fearless in her aspect that lifted her out of the category of ordinary girls — yes, there was.

He repeated experimentally (for all these thoughts had taken but one dizzy instant) her uncle's words. "A musical comedy!" He repeated them with scorn.

She looked up inquiringly and without that answering flash which would have proved her sophistication. "It's not a musical comedy at all, is it?"

Felix was half disappointed and perhaps half relieved. He smiled tolerantly. "No," he said. "It's a play by Bernard Shaw."

"Bernard Shaw? — Oh, yes!"

But there was no use now in her saying "Oh, yes!" in that tone of voice to him. He had "her number," he said grimly to himself. Besides, Shaw was not one of the people that you Oh yessed. You were either in on Shaw, or you weren't. She was an outsider. That was settled. . . . A daughter of the bourgeoisie, merely.

"What's this play about?" she asked.

He caught the suggestion that of course they both knew what all the other plays were about; but it didn't go down.

"It's about —" he began, and then stopped. "Why spoil it by telling about it beforehand?"

He had a reason. It had struck him as being interesting to wait and see what she thought of Shaw herself, without a preface from an enthusiastic disciple. He said to himself that it would be amusing to observe the impact of Shavian ideas upon a virgin mind. And then, too, perhaps she was susceptible to the influence of such ideas. . . . He checked himself midway in the imaginary direction of her intellectual and spiritual re-education, by reminding himself that she was the niece of James F. Bassett — a daughter of the bourgeoisie.

"Why are you so quiet?" she asked. "Cat got your tongue?"

"Thinking," he said.

They were walking through the streets they had traversed two nights before, taking her home — but how differently! Not that, Felix had to confess to himself, he could see much difference outwardly in her attitude to him; it was what it had always been except for those few impassioned moments in the darkness of the tunnel — how far away, and dim and unreal, those kisses seemed now! Yet she was the same girl, and there was something in her manner even now which showed that she might become again at any moment the careless, laughing girl she had been that day. Everything was there except — except his own belief that she shared with him a secret emotion. He could not believe that now.

Apparently she did like him; he no longer feared her mockery. But if this chance encounter was not a joke to her, still it was only a lark. She had other friends, other pleasures; and so had he. Each would go back to his own world. It would remain only an interesting memory for both of them.

He realized that his arm, upon which her hand lay lightly, was fixed in a crook of wooden stiffness. Was he afraid of her? No! Had he ceased to like her? Not exactly. It was only that he did not know her. That was the trouble. She had become a stranger.

The car stopped, and they got on. She began to make casual conversation. He tried to talk. . . . But how could he talk when he could not speak freely? He wanted to ask her about herself. But his question would be a confession of his misunderstanding of her status; he flushed at the thought, and the sentences he was addressing to her became confused, and only straightened themselves out by the aid of his utmost determination.

She ought to realize that some explanation was required. If her present friendliness was in good faith, she would set herself right about the mystery of her stenographic masque-

rade. But she seemed to behave as though nothing in the least unusual had occurred. . . . Well, he would pretend that there was nothing strange about it to him, either. He could keep it up as long as she could.

They were behaving a little like two lovers who have had a quarrel, which neither will admit has actually occurred. . . .

She enjoyed the play, and he enjoyed her pleasure as much as the play itself. She clutched his hand in an emotion of impersonal delight when the soldier explained that his revolver was loaded with chocolate instead of bullets; and somehow that touch soothed, if it did not quite allay, his troubled thoughts concerning her. He took her hand fearlessly when the curtain rose again, and she yielded it with a quiet warmth in which there seemed to be implicit all the mutual understanding that he had but lately deemed a vain illusion. He said to himself, "She does love me!"—and then, more reasonably, "We really like each other, and it will be fun to go to plays and things together."

But he refused to be deceived by her enthusiastic enjoyment of the play into regarding her as a fellow adept in the Shavian mysteries. He realized for the first time how much sheer unintellectual fun there was in a Shaw play — and how much plain hearty common sense such as anybody ought to enjoy. He perceived, and liked, the spiritual robustness which rose to the call of Shaw's humour; but that did not mean that she necessarily realized or approved the ultimate significance of his ideas. Not that it made any difference!

"Do you think," he asked, as they left the theatre, "that Shaw overdoes this idea of the man-hunting woman?"

She laughed lightly. "I suppose not," she said, and took his arm. "Let's walk home, if you don't mind. I'd rather."

3

He wanted to talk to her. He couldn't. The soft touch of her hand on his arm was exasperating. It either meant

something or nothing. Was she merely a young lady whom he had taken to the theatre, or —? His thoughts surged distractedly between love and a kind of hatred.

He could endure the suspense no longer. "What," he demanded, "were you doing in your uncle's office the other day?"

She looked up at him. "Seeing what it was like," she said.

As an explanation that left much to be desired. But it had a note of calm intimacy which encouraged him to further inquiry.

"Well, and what was it like?"

"Rather interesting," she said. Then she met his puzzled glance, and exclaimed, "Oh! don't you know? I supposed Uncle Jim was telling you all about me there in the library."

"We were talking about politics," he said.

She laughed. "My egotism again! Well, you see, I think maybe I'm going to be a stenographer. Uncle Jim said I could try it. He's very patient with my vagaries."

"But why a stenographer?"

"I don't know — I just want to do something. It may be a foolish idea. Everybody seems to think so."

That *was* interesting. A daughter of the bourgeoisie who wanted to "do something." But Felix did not permit his enthusiasm to show itself.

He merely asked:

"Where did you learn to run a typewriter?"

"At the business college here this winter. I learned stenography, too. It's easy — and more fun than the things you learn at college."

"Have you been to college?"

"Oberlin. A terrible place. I only went two terms.— And a part of another." Her hand slipped from his arm, and she involuntarily quickened her step, and then halted for him half a pace ahead.

"Why did you stop?"

"Got expelled," she said laughingly. "That's why I came here to Uncle Jim's. To start life anew!"

"What did you get expelled for?" he asked, pursuing his inquisition relentlessly.

"Breaking the rules," she said, in a tone which seemed to point out that his question answered itself.

"I've never been to college," said Felix, "and I don't know what one gets expelled for. I'm curious to know."

"Well," she said, "the final thing was when I climbed out of the window and went skating, and came back at four o'clock in the morning and found the window locked and couldn't get in. That's the sort of thing you get expelled for — if you happen to be a girl. And if it hadn't been that, if would have been something else.— I didn't care," she added defiantly, "I was sick of the place.— And now," she said, taking his arm again, "are you satisfied? Or do you want to write to the Dean and get a list of all the other rules I broke? I think, first and last, I broke them all."

"Good for you!" said Felix enthusiastically. Yet there was something about her way of telling the story which made him a little impatient. If she had been a boy, he thought, she would have related the epic of her expulsion with great pride, and in full detail. Were girls never proud of their rebellions? He admired in Joyce the fact that she had rebelled; it justified his conviction that there was something free and fearless about her. She had doubtless rebelled magnificently! Well, why didn't she talk about it magnificently? It wasn't as if she couldn't expect complete sympathy from him. She might have to pretend to her folks that she was ashamed of it all, but why pretend to him?

"I'm glad you raised a little hell," he said.

She refused to respond to his enthusiasm. "Oh, I don't know," she said. "It isn't supposed to be the thing, if you're a girl, to be expelled from college. I certainly heard enough about it at the time. I was made to feel like the world's worst criminal."

"I don't see why a girl isn't as much entitled to her fling as a boy," he said.

She regarded him gravely as if to ask if he really meant that. His look steadfastly maintained that he really did.

"The things they make a fuss about are such *little* things," she began.

He interrupted. "No, that isn't the point. They are such *human* things. What they do at such a place is to deny you the right to be a human being. A girl isn't supposed to be a human being."

"No — she isn't," agreed the girl.

"They are supposed to be angels," pursued Felix.

"Young ladies," corrected Joyce, with a note of scorn which he hailed with inward approval.

"Which seems to be," he said, "an elaborate pretence of not being human."

"Of not being a *girl*," said Joyce. "I know how not to be, but —"

"It doesn't seem sensible?"

"It isn't easy. I try. But I forget."

"You would," he said. "You are a real human being."

"I don't know exactly what you mean by human being," she said. "But I *am* a *girl*. And I simply can't stand being cooped up and watched over by a lot of old maids. It drives me to desperation — I just *have* to break their silly old rules."

Felix wanted to keep the discussion on the plane of generalities, but she descended vivaciously into amusing particulars. "And those rules!" she said. "You wouldn't believe —" She went on to tell him of prohibitions and penalties which he did find sufficiently incredible, in the light of twentieth-century ideas.

"But let's not talk about it," she concluded. "It's over for good, as far as I'm concerned — and I'm sure you're not interested in such —"

"I'm interested in *you*," he said.

4

She was silent.

In that silence there was a revelation for him which he felt she shared — a moment of utter intimacy such as no words can give. They both emerged from it a little dazed and embarrassed. They spoke quickly, and as if not quite knowing what they were saying.

"Tell me some more about yourself," he commanded.

"The rest of my history? Well — I've always been a sort of tomboy. My mother died when I was little, and my father always let me do anything I liked. We lived in a little town in Ohio. And then my father failed in business, and — and died. And I went to live with my Uncle Edward in Columbus. He is religious — very much so; he regards me as a limb of Satan. And I must say that I've sometimes behaved like one!" She laughed. "Uncle Edward sent me to Oberlin — and that didn't work out — and I came here. Uncle Jim is nice, don't you think? In some ways he's like my father. But no, not really — my father was never very practical. Do you know what Uncle Jim says?" She laughed. "That all I need is to get married. I even think he's got the man picked out!" She met Felix's startled glance. "Oh, not you!" she laughed.

"And what," asked Felix huskily, "do you think of Uncle Jim's candidate?"

She stopped, and stamped her foot. "I hate him!" she declared passionately, and then turned to him. "Now that's everything. You know my past, present, and possible future. And now," irrelevantly, "are you going to be friends with me again?"

In the darkness Felix put his arms about her. "Not friends," he said, and drew her to him.

His kiss was a solemn defiance of Uncle Jim and the unknown candidate.

XL Reactions

I

"DO you really love me, Felix?" she asked, standing before him with her arms upon his shoulders. "I do, too. Isn't it strange? *Dear!*" And they kissed again. . . .

"But, Heavens, wasn't it sudden!" she said, as they went on slowly.

"Not so very," he said. "I think we made a very respectable delay, considering that we both knew it from the first minute."

"I didn't," she said.

"You didn't!"

"Well, I knew something had happened, but I didn't know just what. I liked you. And I kept saying to myself, Now don't make a fool of yourself! — Did I make a fool of myself, Felix? Should I have waited, and been demure and so forth? I don't mean *now*. That was — inevitable. But on the roller coaster. I was hoping you would kiss me. But afterwards I thought I shouldn't have let you. I kind of worried about those kisses all day yesterday."

"You darling," said Felix.

"Perhaps I shouldn't even be telling you what I feel now. But I'm like that. I do whatever I want to, and think about it afterward. Do you think maybe I'm just a silly girl, to fall in love so quickly? I don't feel silly. I feel —"

"I think you're glorious," said Felix.

"If we had known each other for years and years, perhaps we wouldn't know each other any better, after all, than we do now. But I don't care, anyway. We love each other. . . ."

"That's the important thing," said Felix.

They lingered on Uncle Jim's porch, prolonging their farewell. "When can I see you again — tomorrow night?" he asked.

"No," she said, frowning and shaking her head. "Not tomorrow. I'm sorry. Wednesday?"

So it was agreed.

2

Felix was half way home before there crept into his mind the thought — of all thoughts the most hateful, the most calculated to curdle the dreamy ecstasy of young and happy love — the thought of money. . . .

Before he thought of that, he had been as the gods. He saw himself and his beloved wandering joyously hand in hand through a life which was an infinite vista of Saturday afternoons on the Island and Monday evenings at the theatre, with long walks in between. His imagination was completely happy in the contemplation of such a life, until with sudden perversity it strayed off that happy path through a gate — into a little house. . . .

It was the same little house that he had inhabited with her in fancy after their first meeting. But now the imagining of it brought a pang — of envy, of anger, of frustration. The trouble was that now he wanted to make it real. . . . He wanted very much to make it real. Only when he turned to the Port Royal of reality to think of such a little house, it became too drab and dingy a picture — too much like the houses on the street he lived in. The thought of himself and her in such a house as he could actually provide, was too painful. Some of the glory faded from the picture of their love at the very thought. No — not that — not the life he had seen and known — the dreary, frowsy life of a wage-slave's mate. . . . No.

He turned again to the real pure idyllic fancy, and from thence to the unspoiled joys of remembering the swift sweet moments of love that they had already garnered.

But now he was not content to enjoy these memories in solitude. He wanted to share them with some one. He turned his steps toward Tom Alden's house. . . . He would tell Tom about her.

He routed Tom from his garret by loud rings at the bell. He had seen a light in the dormer windows, and knew that Tom was still up. Tom appeared at last, blinking.

"I had fallen asleep on the couch," he said. "Come on up!"

The sheets of a letter lay on the floor by Tom's couch. "I went to sleep reading it," he said, gathering up the pages.

There was a secret in Tom's life, approached and veered off from in conversation so often that it had been completely circumnavigated, and its boundaries were familiar to Felix. Here it was, the fringe of it, again.

"Is it from your mysterious sweetheart?" asked Felix shyly, emboldened by his own adventure to trench upon the untold secret.

"No," said Tom, ruffling his hair. "But it's about her." He sat down on the couch, groped on the floor for his corncob pipe, lighted it, and said:

"She's an actress. At any rate, she had a part in a play. I was in Chicago, and I met her at an after-theatre supper-party of Doyle Clavering's. I was bored. I couldn't talk their talk."

"Naturally," said Felix.

"So I thought I'd try talking my own. I commenced to tell the girl next to me about Nietzsche."

Felix laughed. "You would!" he said. "And how did she take it?"

"She answered me with a quotation from 'Thus Spake Zarathustra.'"

"Well!"

"That's just the way I felt. An actress who quotes Nietzsche! . . . And I was lonely. It was just after Madge and I had separated. I fell in love with her."

"Of course!" said Felix. A part of his mind was wish-

ing that he *had* been right in that wild surmise about Joyce and Bernard Shaw: suppose she had quoted "Man and Superman.". . . He shook his head, banishing the thought.

"I fell in love with her," said Tom thoughtfully. "And she with me. It happened all in a moment." (Yes, Felix thought, things do happen like that!) "We had a wonderful time together. For a month." (Why only a month, Felix wondered?) "It was too beautiful to last, we agreed. And when we parted we said, Let's not write letters.— It was too precious to spoil by attempting to prolong it in mere words. . . . But I did write." (Of course! thought Felix.) "I wrote to her in care of Doyle — I didn't know where she was. And I had just mailed my letter when I got one from her, forwarded by Clavering. . . . We've been writing ever since." There was a long pause, and Felix waited for the story's evidently almost-tragic conclusion. "She's in Chicago again, and I'm going there next week to meet her."

"Yes," said Felix, still not understanding why Tom was so gloomy about it.

Tom had risen and was searching along the bookcase. He found a book, brought it back, and began to read sentences quietly, with brooding pauses, from a page:

"Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us,— for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. . . . How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy? . . . While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or the work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend. Not to dis-

criminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening."

He closed the book and dropped it abruptly to the floor. "We were like that," he said, "We *lived* that philosophy, a year ago."

He relighted his pipe. "I have just had a letter from Doyle." He opened the letter and searched for the passage, while Felix rose and walked about, his mind seeking to clear itself from the drug-like beauty of those words to which he had been listening — those words, which were like a perfumed breeze out of nowhere, or out of some strange life lived before, affecting him with a strange nostalgia. Tom had commenced to read:

"*Roxie is here, blooming and bubbling as usual — a year younger rather than older. A delightful child! I sincerely congratulate you. I would have written sooner, but she only told us of the engagement last night. Are you going to settle down in Port Royal, or move here? Of course, there's always New York. Roxie is very enthusiastic about New York. But she refuses to confide her plans to us — being only a shade less secretive than yourself.*"

Tom laid the letter down, and lighted another match.

"But do you really think she said that?" was all Felix could think of to say. After the music of the moment before, this did sound incongruously like the familiar strains of "Home, Sweet Home." He did not want to believe that a girl who had believed — who had *lived* — that other life should talk about being "engaged." . . .

"Of course she said it, or Doyle wouldn't say so. The only question is, does she mean it? I shouldn't wonder. . . . Women like to be settled, to know where they are at. . . . But she wasn't just a woman a year ago. She was a free spirit.— Doesn't look much like free spirits now, does it, Felix? I'm wondering if I want to be one myself, now." He rose in his turn and walked up and down the room.

"If she wants to marry me, Felix, if that is what she really wants, I shall want that, too. I shall dream the old dream once more. In spite of all I know about it — the perpetual bondage, the mutual slavery that crucifies two souls — in spite of everything, I shall want the happiness that one always hopes to get that way. I shall forget that I ever wanted freedom.— I don't blame her. I blame human nature. I feel it in myself, the instinct that says, Hold out your hands and let them be tied, handcuffed to hers until death do you part, and you will be happy! — I believe it, even now. I merely know that it isn't so. It isn't so, Felix! . . . If she knows it too, we shall be strong enough to resist. But if she doesn't know it, if she doesn't want freedom more than anything else in the world, we are lost. — But I needn't worry you about it. Come, let's have a drink. I shall get straightened out in my mind, I hope, before next week."

Felix did not tell Tom about Joyce that night.

3

"It is a rare and happy lover," says the learned Winckler in his History of Love, "who does not find in himself emotions hostile to his passion; and it is perhaps a mere accident of temperament, and not by any means a reflection of the actual facts of the situation, that these emotions should express themselves now as a timorous and selfish caution, and again as a profound unselfish conviction of the duty of renunciation; now as hateful doubts of the fitness of his beloved, and again as a generous fear of his own unworthiness. It is, once more, doubtful if the lover's strict apprehension of the regard or disregard due to institution, ceremony and current ethics is so much a matter of principle as of temperamental opportunism, since these same hostile emotions may appear with equal felicity in the guise of a conventional moral scruple against possession, when the facts of the case permit, or in the guise of a libertinism which evades all but the most superficial possibilities of such pos-

session. In a word, whether it appear as a ridiculous puritanism, a conventianal propriety, or a heartless profligacy, the lover's hesitation would appear to spring from the same (so far unexplored) emotional sources. It should be added that the complexity and variety and beauty, the tragedy and melodrama and farce, of civilized love are apparently created, with but an adventitious aid from circumstance, out of the shock and struggle of this obscure emotional warfare."

But Felix had not read the learned Winckler; and it is doubtful in any case if he would have been able to apply these sayings to himself. He was not aware of any internal struggle. He was at most aware sometimes, when he was not with Joyce, of a discrepancy between her and a not very distinct ideal of his imagination. But that ideal, as he remembered the warm reality of his beloved, grew dim and pale and seemed, when he met the reality again, to fade and perish utterly.

He was in love! It was a fact too wonderful to palter with. . . . And yet, even as he thought of her, his mind braced itself, would not quite surrender to the profound restfulness of happiness, but held itself erect and proud, as though indeed his soul perceived in her a beautiful and sweet antagonist.

XLI Argument

I

WHEN Felix called at Joyce's house on Wednesday evening, she was ready, dressed in a middie-blouse and walking skirt. She met him in the hall and hurried out with him impatiently. "Thank God!" she said, "I'm free from that house and those people for one evening!" She was flushed and in a temper, and Felix sensed some kind of family quarrel had been going on.

He was a little startled, too, at seeing her for the first time in this rebellious rôle. He had had a romantic fancy of her in revolt, but the reality was different. There was nothing poetically beautiful about her anger. It made her eyes shine and her cheeks glow, but it gave a hard look to her face, and her chin had a dangerous rather than a defiant tilt. There was no tenderness in her, and very little girlishness — she looked positively boyish. And she was not pretty, but beautiful — with a strange, smouldering, sullen beauty. . . . In her fighting mood she must be a difficult customer, Felix reflected. But it was hard to think of any one quarrelling with Jim Bassett.

"I thought you and Uncle Jim got along all right together," he hazarded.

"It wasn't so much Uncle Jim," said the girl. "It's Aunt Hattie." She was swinging along with an even more masculine stride than usual, and becoming calmer as she put her repressed emotions into muscular exertion. "Uncle Jim's not bad if he's let alone. But he thinks that everything *she* thinks is gospel.— Do you know how to run a motorboat?"

"No," said Felix.

"Well, come along and I'll teach you. Uncle Jim's got one down at the boat-house. He taught me to run it when I was here last summer. I've got the key. We'll take a little ride up the river."

Felix believed that he believed in the equality of the sexes, but he was a little ashamed for at least one fleeting moment, at the boat-house, that it was she who took efficient charge of affairs, rather than he. At the same time, he was a little relieved to find that she did not expect him to understand the intricacies of a gasoline motor. She quickly overhauled the engine, filled the gasoline-tank and the oil-cups; and with some slight assistance from him, under her directions, the boat was disengaged from the landing and started noisily out upon the slow waters of the river. It was a moony night.

"I'll steer," she said. "I know the river. Come up here and put your arm around me and say a kind word or two. I'm all riled up."

He obeyed, but her authoritarian air, even though mitigated by a whimsical smile and a kind of rough tenderness in her voice, did not please him. In fact, it irritated him.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"J. H.," she said briefly.

But she said it in a tone which he had heard her use only once before, when she had said, "I hate him!"—and he knew whom she meant.

His instinctive feeling was resentment. J. H. had been settled and put out of the way last Monday night. What right had she to be bothered by any thoughts of J. H.?

"J. H. is Uncle Jim's candidate for your affections, I take it?" he said in the tone of one who courteously shows an interest.

"Aunt Hattie's, rather. She put Uncle Jim up to it. It's all her idea. Uncle Jim is a big baby."

"Well?" asked Felix, after a silence. He was looking at her hands on the wheel; they had seemed all softness to his touch, but now they seemed all firm muscle — they

were, like the curt, explosive phrases of her speech, a part of her new personality.

"He was there last night," she said tensely. "That's why I couldn't see you. They invited him to dinner." She jerked the boat sharply about, and headed it upstream.

"Well," said Felix, letting his fingers play with her bare, sweet-fleshed arm, "they can't *make* you marry him."

"No, but they can make it mighty unpleasant for me. . . . You see, I played around a lot with him this winter. I've no doubt Aunt Hattie is right in saying that I encouraged him. It's my own fault, I suppose. . . . She says I don't know my own mind."

"Do you?" asked Felix. It was the tone of a disinterested, amused, unprejudiced byestander.

She looked at him and smiled uncertainly. "It's all very well for you to take it so calmly," she said. "But it's no joke to me. . . . I was upset enough about his coming, but when I saw him appear with *both* flowers *and* candy —!"

"Flowers *and* candy?" Felix repeated wonderingly.

"Yes. Either one would have meant nothing in particular. But both —! And he was very polite, and very very respectful, and hellishly nervous.— And so am I. Light me a cigarette. And be careful where you throw the match. Thank you!"

She puffed on the cigarette.

"I didn't know you smoked,"said Felix.

"Learned it at college. Only thing I did learn there. Don't interrupt, I want to get this off my chest.— The whole thing was staged. Aunt Harriet was oh so sweet to us. And Uncle Jim so fondly paternal. And J. H.— I knew he was going to propose." She threw the cigarette overboard. "I fought hard to keep from being left alone with him; but it was no good. So I thought — let him go through with it." Her fingers gripped the steering-wheel savagely, and her voice was vibrant. "Let him get down on his knees, the idiot, and take what's coming to him."

"And what happened?" asked Felix, stroking her arm.

"He proposed in due and regular form, all right."

"And what did you say?"

"Various things. I said I was surprised. He pointed out that I needn't have been, because of — well, because of a number of incidents. I said he had misunderstood me. He argued with me about that. We had a regular debate. Finally I got mad and told him I never wanted to see him again."

Felix patted her arm a little.

2

She looked at him from the corner of her eyes, and then back at the channel. "Well, I must say you're a cool one," she remarked quietly. "I sit here and tell you that I've turned down a flattering proposal of marriage — for your sake — and you take it as a perfect matter of course. Are girls in the habit of throwing suitors downstairs to please you?"

"Why was the proposal so flattering?" Felix asked, a little more coolly still. "Is he rich?"

"No-o. Probably he will be some day. But that's not the point. He's a perfectly nice young man."

"I thought you said you hated him."

"I do. And that's why — because he is so perfectly nice. He worships the ground I tread on, and all that sort of thing. And once we were married, he'd expect me to be the perfect wife. I couldn't smoke cigarettes, for instance. He'd be shocked. He has an ideal of me — and I'd have to live up to that ideal, if it killed me."

"Then you weren't turning him down for my sake, after all," said Felix. "You were doing it for perfectly selfish reasons."

"I like that!" she said.

"Well, weren't you?"

"Oh, I suppose so!" she cried, in a tone at once annoyed and plaintive, and for the first time that evening lacking in abrupt certitude. Her next words came more softly: "And

perhaps my going out with you tonight is for a selfish reason, Felix. You are the sort of person to whom I can say what I really think. I can be my real self with you. Just selfishness, I suppose — ? But what's the use of thinking about things *that* way? It's not very nice. . . ."

"I think it is," countered Felix. "You've paid me the highest compliment that I ever received, just now."

"What — when?"

"In saying that I am the sort of person with whom you can be your real self."

"Oh — that. Well, it's true."

"It's beautiful. It makes me very happy to hear you say that."

"Happier than — than to hear me say I love you?"

"Yes," said Felix. (He lied — for there was a note in her voice when she said those words that went tingling all through his body. But he was not going to admit it.) "Any two people can be in love," he said. "It's a rarer thing to be free. If I make you feel free — if I enable you to be your real self — well, I'd rather do that than to give you the mahogany furniture and cut glass that J. H. would give you."

She bent over and caressed his cheek for a moment with hers. "But I'm not sure," she said softly, "that's it's altogether a good thing for people to be their real selves. I'm not sure that I like my real self."

"I like it," he said.

"Perhaps you don't know all about it. Perhaps some time you won't feel that way. . . . .Besides, Felix, what is one's real self? If you hadn't come into Uncle Jim's office that day, I would probably have accepted J. H. last night. I had been rather intending to. And it wouldn't have been altogether Aunt Harriet's doing — it would have been I that did it. And been very happy about it. . . . And that person would have been *me*. Me, Felix. Because I'm that kind of person, too."

"And would you have been the Perfect Wife?"

"I would have tried, Felix. I would have wanted to make him happy. And where I couldn't quite succeed in being his ideal, I would let him think I was. I would *make* him think I was."

"Lie to him, in other words."

"Oh, yes; it's easy enough to lie."

"Real happiness can't be founded on lies," said Felix soberly.

"Perhaps not *real* happiness — whatever that is. I've never seen any of that kind. But there's plenty of ordinary, every-day happiness founded on lies. It's the commonest thing in the world."

"Do you want that kind of happiness?"

"I don't know — I want some kind." The stubbornness vanished from her voice again as she said, looking out over the moonlit river, "Isn't it a lovely night?"

3

It was a lovely night. And a strange conversation, upon such a night! Felix wondered at himself for a moment. He wondered why the moonlight did not make him feel romantic; but the truth was, its silvery light, and the dark shore slipping past, and the rhythmic throbbing of the engine, gave him a feeling of detachment from mortal affairs. He felt that his immediate concerns, and hers, were of no great significance; and he and Joyce were somehow not mere anxious lovers, but beings suspended in space, between sky and water, where nothing mattered except truth, and that beauty which is the same as truth. . . .

"I can't promise you ordinary happiness," he said slowly. "I don't want it for myself, and I don't offer it to *you*. I think we ought to speak plainly about this. We love each other; but are we ready to give to each other what we really want?"

"What *do* you want from me, Felix?" she asked, a little awed.

"Something better than just ordinary, every-day happi-

ness," he said. "And I want to give you something better. Only I want to be sure that you also think it is better."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll try to tell you. It's hard, because — well, I guess it's because I'm afraid if you know what I think, you won't love me any more."

She laughed. "Try it!" she said.

"I don't believe in most of the things that other people believe in," he began. "For instance, I don't believe in private property." And he gave her a brief exposition of Socialism, freely rendered, with a touch of Anarchism in it. "So you see," he concluded, "I can't put my heart and soul into the effort to own things."

"I know," she said. "I understand that, Felix. My father was like that, about money. I don't care. I like you that way."

"And then," he said, "I haven't any of the conventional religious ideas. I don't believe in God."

"We won't quarrel about that," she said. "Go on."

"And I don't believe in the conventional ideas of marriage."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, there is a conventional idea of how people who are in love with each other ought to behave. They are supposed to own each other. And belong, both of them, to a home. . . ."

"Don't you believe in having a home?"

"I don't believe in being imprisoned in one. And that's what it comes to. A wife can't go out and earn her own living. She must stay at home. You couldn't be a stenographer if we were married. It wouldn't be respectable."

"By the way," said Joyce, "I've stopped being a stenographer."

Felix was startled. "Why?"

"Because Lucy has come back."

"But — aren't you going on with it somewhere else?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure that I want to earn my own

living. The truth is, I wanted to work because I thought I would be free. But on a stenographer's wages I can't be free. I'll have to live with Uncle Jim anyway. . . . And I've so many things to think about. Between you and J. H. I'd be making mistakes all the time in spelling. . . . I'd rather loaf.— I didn't tell J. H., because he would think I was coming to my senses. But I *can* tell you, because I think you'll like me anyway.— You see I'm not your ideal, Felix. I'm all mixed up."

"You are mixed up," he said, "because you still believe in conventional ideas."

"Well, tell me yours, then."

He returned to the exposition of his principles. . . .

"But people *have* to get married," she protested.

"Not necessarily. In the Future —"

"But this isn't the future, Felix."

"The future must begin some time. It has already begun for some people."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Well, I wish them good luck with their experiments. But I'm not that kind of person. It all seems rather absurd to me."

4

Felix was silent; but not in wrath. He was looking at the shimmer of moonlight-edged hair about her face. He was wishing that it was not his duty to preach to her. . . .

"Go on, Felix. This is the time to talk. In five minutes we will arrive at our destination, and then we must stop arguing."

"I didn't know we had a destination," said Felix.

"Our destination is a tiny island owned by Uncle Jim Bassett. It has a cabin on it, stocked with canned things, and a stove to cook them on, if we are hungry. And there's not a living soul there, Felix, and we'll be absolutely out of this populous world for three hours."

"Wonderful!" said Felix.

"And yet you pretend that you don't believe in private property!"

"Under capitalism —" he began.

"Felix," she said, "you mustn't think I mind your queer ideas. I like crazy ideas — and crazy people. They're such a relief from the J. H.s with which the world is full up. And I want you to tell me all about them. But — you mustn't expect me to — take all of them seriously."

"That is just what I do expect," said Felix, sitting up very straight beside her. "My ideas are not a matter of entertainment for people who have nothing better to do than listen to them. I am not talking to you just for fun. My ideas are serious matters to me."

"How serious?" she asked teasingly. "If you had to choose between your sweetheart and your principles, which would you choose?"

"My principles," he said.

She laughed. "I wonder!"

And for a moment he burned with a perverse desire to prove to her the truth of his words.

XLII "If young hearts were not so clever"

1

"HERE we are," she said, and headed the boat in across the moonlit water to a low-lying mass of shrubs and trees that rose to their left. A moment later the boat grounded in the shallow water, and they stopped the engine, jumped out ankle deep into the water, and shoved the boat safely up on the beach.

Before them, fifty yards away, was the little cabin of which she had spoken. About it was a cleared space, and all around that a wilderness of ancient trees, and tall reedy grass, and willows slanting to the water's edge.

"Our desert island," said Joyce, stopping on the path. "Kiss me, Felix."

Into that kiss Felix put a fierce repentance for the sorry thought he had only a moment since harboured against her; and then, in her sweetness, in the sheer delight of her lips and arms and breathing breast, forgot all such thoughts. Here was peace and happiness.

And while he fumbled at the lock with the key she gave him, she turned and looked out into the moonlight-touched mystery of darkness all around them, and held out her arms to it. "Isn't it wonderful," she said softly, "to be away from all the world — just you and I, for the first time. . . . Oh, I'm so happy!"

2

They took possession of the cabin like happy children. Not because they were hungry, but because it would be fun to cook, they opened some tins of soup and vegetables, and Felix went out to gather the sticks washed up on the shore

and dried in the sun. He strayed far afield for his third armful, and was just nearing the cabin when she came out to call him. "That's enough," she said. "You've brought enough wood to keep us going a week. Everything's ready, come on in." She had on an apron, and her golden hair was tousled about her face. Felix had the strange sense that he had seen her thus before. . . .

It was a tiny place, but there was a large table capable of seating a family, and bunks built around the walls, where, Joyce explained to him, Uncle Jim had once upon a time stowed his family when they came out here for week-ends. Joyce had spread some paper napkins at one corner of the big table, and she turned with flushed cheeks from the hot stove with a steaming bowl of soup. Pork-and-beans came next, and they finished with coffee and cigarettes.

"Pretty nice place, isn't it?" said Joyce, coming around and seating herself on his knees.

"Yes," said Felix. "I wish —"

"Wish it was ours?" She grinned as she finished it for him. "Well, it is — for the time being. Nobody's interested in the old motor-boat. It's ours whenever we want it. Do-you-love-me, Felix?"

He kissed her. In the joyous enchantment of those kisses, time passed unregarded. And it seemed to them as though they could stay for ever in that happy state of young passion, in which the touch of hands and lips and the sound of murmured endearments has almost too much of magic in it — when these things yield more than the heart can desire. It was with a kind of reluctant sadness that they saw that first chaste magic depart, and trembling hands and beating hearts told them that they stood upon the verge of a more desperate wish. He looked at her and saw troubled confession in her eyes.

"No," she breathed, but she yielded herself to his tormented clasp yet another moment, and yearned to him with candid fervour; then drew herself from his arms. "No," she said. "Let's talk."

They talked — about what a nice little house it was, and how lucky they were to be able to get away from everybody to its shelter; and presently they found themselves talking about marriage. They talked about it in a quite impersonal way.

Felix had not been very clear upon the subject. He was by no means certain in his own mind as to the proper boundary line between theory and practice. He had no definite intention of entering upon an unconventional course of conduct, nor any intention of persuading Joyce to such a course. He wanted her to believe in his theories. Perhaps more than anything, he wanted the triumph of converting her to such theories, theories which were strange, daring, and his own! Perhaps that conversion was a condition of his own surrender. Or perhaps, in the midst of a sudden and overwhelmingly human experience, he clung to the memory of his shadow-land of ideas, in which he could be so much more enterprising, so much bolder and surer of himself, than in this unaccustomed and surprising world of desperate reality in which he found himself a shy adventurer. . . . In the midst of his argument against marriage, she slipped from his knee and went back to her seat just around the corner of the table.

"But marriage," she said, "is what people make it. It all depends on whom you marry."

Felix had unconsciously been describing her marriage with such a person as J. H., and pointing out its defects. It was no wonder that she was unable to recognize the picture as pertaining to themselves. . . . Now he was arguing the absurdity of *promising* to love. "How can any one keep such a promise?" he asked scornfully.

She looked at him with hurt eyes. "Why not?" she asked.

"Suppose," he said ingeniously, "you had married J. H. — and then met me?"

She smiled. "Then I would have been a very different person. And I wouldn't be here with you now."

"Oh, yes," he said. "You might be here. . . . I can imagine you, flinging out of J. H.'s house after a quarrel with him, just as you did this evening out of your uncle's. People don't change all at once. You are you, and you couldn't adapt yourself suddenly to an absurd ideal. You've never succeeded in adapting yourself very well anywhere. Have you?"

She was silent, and he was instantly sorry that he had said it. He took her hand, that lay on the table before him, and caressed it. She returned the pressure of his fingers — and in an instant both of them began to tremble, and they looked into each other's eyes almost with terror. He bent toward her, but she bit her lip and shook her head from side to side. The dizziness passed . . . a little.

"You would still be you," she heard his voice saying unsteadily. "And you might have come here with me just the same."

"Don't let's think of things like that," she said in a low voice.

"But isn't it true?"

"No," she said stubbornly.

"Yes," he insisted. "Our feelings could not change because of —"

"Maybe," she conceded reluctantly, "but —"

"And you — would still be holding hands with me — just the same."

She drew her hands away.

"What makes us love each other now," he went on inexorably, "would make us love each other then."

She shook her head slowly.

"We would want to kiss each other," he said, "even though your kisses *were* legally the property of another man."

"You make it so horrid, Felix! You make me feel guilty, being here with you. What a nasty idea to put into a person's head. Why, I feel as though —"

He came around behind her chair, and put his arms about

her, and drew back her head. She resisted. But with the imaginative zest of youth, she was unable to resist the strange pleasure of savouring in fantasy an unknown experience: she was pretending to be the wife of another. And Felix knew it. He held her more tightly in his arms. She rose, and struggled, and her breathing grew heavy; but she was fighting less against him than against an impulse to surrender, and at last when his lips touched hers she gave up and drank his kiss deeply, passionately — and then began suddenly to cry, and sheltered her head on his breast.

Bewildered and half ashamed of his triumph, he petted and rallied her. She stopped crying, laughed, and wiped her eyes. "How perfectly silly!" she said. And then — "let's get out of here. I don't feel comfortable any more. And anyway, it's time for us to go."

3

They left the cabin, both a little sad and moody, not exchanging their thoughts. Felix was thinking, "What a fool I am!"

"We've spoiled a perfectly good evening," she said, as they went down to the boat.

"And learned something," he said.

"Yes," she said, "but what?"

They did not argue or discuss, they only talked humanly and romantically, on the homeward trip. "Anyway," she said as they parted, after Felix had uttered repentant protestations which might have seemed to make her question superfluous, "you do love me, don't you?"

XLIII Ethics

I

DURING the rest of the week they spent every evening together at the Cabin. They were both in love with their quaint domesticity, and its details furnished a happy expedient to mitigate what at times — but only at times — seemed to them both the unendurable rigours of unfulfilled love. Another expedient was theoretical discussion. And in these discussions Felix managed to clarify somewhat his views on the subject of marriage — which was still treated in their discussions as an abstract question.

"I don't say," Felix explained on one occasion, "that a free society can be created all at once, or that any two individuals should crucify themselves before the public in the name of principle. Though if any two people wanted to do that, I would think it splendid of them."

"And I," said Joyce, "would think it ridiculous." She had become more acclimated to arguments by this time, and expressed herself often both frankly and forcibly.

"Do you think The Woman Who Did was ridiculous?" he demanded, referring to a book he had lent her.

"No — but I did think she was very foolish. And her child certainly did not thank her for being brought into the world a —"

"Of course," said Felix, before she could finish the sentence. . . . There was another thing. He never could get her to use the scientific and poetic terms which he thought appropriate to such discussions. She banged him mercilessly with the common word, the brutal phrase. When he protested, she said only, "Well, that's what people will say!"

"Of course," said Felix, "where there are children to be considered, there is some excuse for conforming to the convention of marriage. But where two people want to be free, and live independent lives, and do their own work —"

"And never have a home together. . . . Yes, that sort might not mind."

"When two people who love each other don't live together, they are always glad to meet," Felix pointed out. "They spend as much time as they can in each other's company, precisely because they don't have to. When they have to, they begin to want to be apart."

"They may not want to be together *all* the time," said Joyce, "but they want the chance to be together *some* of the time."

"They can have that," said Felix. "They can have a little cabin in the woods somewhere — and be all the happier because nobody knows of their happiness."

Joyce shivered. "*I* wouldn't," she said. "I — what's the use of our pretending that we are just talking generalities? We aren't talking about people at large, we're talking about ourselves — you and me. To begin with, we haven't got a little cabin in the woods. And I would feel like a thief if I used Uncle Jim's place for —"

She paused; he knew that she was trying to think of some term sufficiently brutal, even vulgar, to describe such conduct. He hastened to fend it off by saying, "Perhaps Uncle Jim would not approve of your conduct, as it is — if he only knew."

She shrugged her shoulders, and laughed. "Uncle Jim's human," she said. "And courtship is courtship. Uncle Jim knows I'm wild, but he thinks I'm what he would call a good girl; and while I'm living under his roof, I'm going to be."

"You shall be whatever you like," said Felix coldly. "I ask nothing of you for myself. I ask only that you be true to your own soul."

"Oh, yes," she said. "I'm not accusing you of any-

thing." She laughed, and put her head on his knee, and continued, with a whimsical tenderness in her voice: "You are the most ethical pirate that ever sunk a ship. If I walk the plank, it will be of my own free will. I haven't even the consolation of being led astray."

He took her hand. "I don't want to make you unhappy," he said. "So long as you believe in those old codes of morality, you are quite right in living up to them."

"I suppose I'm just a coward," she said, clinging to his hand.

"No, you're not a coward. You will do whatever you think is right."

"Then," she said, laughing and jumping up, "I will wash the dishes this minute. Whatever else is right, the dishes should be done. Come on Felix, you've got to help me. There's the towel."

2

Felix was more in love with her than ever. This golden creature who could "talk the talk of men, and deal a wound that lingers," this new Joyce who had emerged, as it seemed, from her outward disguise during their long evenings together, enchanted him. He did not care now that she held to a few shreds of conventional morality; she was sufficiently unconventional in her defence of her position. And the deeply satisfying thing was that, whatever their differences of opinion, they were able to utter them to each other with perfect freedom. She was more interesting, he sometimes thought, than if she agreed with him about everything. He had imagined in fancy such superb one-ness of thought with her; but the real she was more charming than his fancy, because full of surprises for him. He asked no more of her. She was wonderful enough.

He wanted to show her off to Tom. He had been eloquent to Tom about her, and had told her all about Tom. He was anxious for them to appreciate each other at first

hand. And so, on Sunday afternoon, just before Tom went to Chicago, Felix took Joyce to see him.

He received them in his garret, in the middle of which stood a large travelling bag, half packed, and then seemingly deserted for the long letter whose closely written sheets covered the table and spilled off on the floor, and from which Tom arose with a dazed and absent air when they entered. He focused his thoughts upon them, and offered them some wine; and when Joyce, somewhat to Felix's surprise, declined it, he suggested tea, with the air of one who remembers the right thing at last.

Felix felt that the occasion had distinctly not started off right. But worse was to come. For Tom, as he made the tea in a masterly fashion, began to talk with a growing geniality which, however, had a horribly social, that is to say, conventional, manner to it. And Joyce responded in the same vein, at first formally, and then with an air of sparkling interest. They were talking about people they both knew, or who were related to people they knew, but in whom, as Felix was irritatedly aware, neither of them had the slightest interest. . . .

It was bad enough of Tom to behave that way; but he had an excuse. The visit to Chicago was on his mind, and he was plainly distrait. But Joyce's conduct seemed inexcusable. She knew what kind of person Tom was — he had told her often enough. And here she was, behaving as though she were making an ordinary social call. In a bourgeois sort of way, she and Tom were getting on famously. It was evident that Joyce had what would be called social charm. But that was not what Felix had brought her there to show off! . . .

He felt very ill at ease. He felt like a stranger to them both, an outsider who had happened in upon a Port Royal host and guest in the dutiful ceremony of their kind. Joyce was utterly disguised for him. He watched for the faintest gleam of the real girl beneath that disguise, but there was nothing. In an effort to break the spell, he of-

fered her a cigarette; she refused it casually, with the faintest air of humorous surprise.

He wondered what impression Tom would get of her: certainly nothing she was saying bore out in the least his eloquent descriptions. Tom would think she was a nice bourgeois girl; that was all. He would think — perhaps — that Felix's eloquent praise of her was merely the folly of the deluded lover. . . . And how could he expect Tom to believe otherwise, if this was the way she behaved?

He had intended to renew his old friendship with Franz, and take Joyce to see him. He had intended to take her with him to the Socialist meetings, which he had not attended for a long while. But he saw the folly of those plans now. In that environment, she would be intolerably bourgeois. . . .

He had desperately to reassure himself that she was — sometimes — with him — another person than the one he saw before him now. With him she was *real*. But the discovery that she was not real anywhere else was disheartening. It took away some of the authenticity of the qualities which he loved in her. To her Uncle Jim, to Tom, to all the world, she was one person — a sufficiently ordinary person. Was that what she was, in truth, after all?

He wished he could throw some verbal bombshell into the polite midst of the little chat that she and Tom were having, something that would shatter its polite pretences. But he was frozen stiff by their efficient and artificial sociability, and could only sit uncomfortably on his chair, filling in with dogged monosyllables the shining opportunities which they both left for him from time to time. . . . He was glad when it was over, and they could go.

3

Outside of the house, in the dusk, she seemed for a moment to become alive again. Regardless of possible onlookers, she pulled Felix's head over to hers, kissed his ear, and then kicked off her shoe into the air. It hurtled twenty

feet away, and she scampered after it and stood on one foot, laughing as she put it on. It struck Felix as a trifle hysterical.

"Well, that's done," she said, taking his arm again.

"What did you think of Tom?" he asked.

She made a face. "Oh, he's very nice. I've no doubt the women are crazy about him."

"Is that all?"

"His place looks as though it hadn't been swept for a year."

"I told you about that," said Felix resentfully.

"But he knew we were coming. . . . And he wasn't shaved."

"Neither am I, for that matter," said Felix.

"Yes, I noticed it," she said dryly.

"But what do such things matter?"

"I like you better when you *are* shaved," she said.

"I meant about Tom. It's his mind—"

"Tom's attraction for you may be a purely intellectual one," said Joyce, "but take it from a girl, it's not his only asset." She laughed. "I think he keeps a three-days' growth of beard as a protection against being kissed by enthusiastic females, if you ask me!"

"Then you did like him?"

"Of course."

"I would never have guessed it."

"There's a lot of things you would never guess, Felix. You are too intellectual to understand women."

"Are you trying to make me jealous?" he asked lightly.

She laughed. "I don't know that I'd mind if you were —a little!"

"Well, it's an old trick," said Felix. "But it doesn't work with me. I'm not going to tie you up. You are a free woman. You can do as you like."

"You can't guess whom you just missed when you came for me today," she said provocatively.

"No, I can't," he replied stolidly.

"J. H."

"Again?"

"Oh, yes. He wouldn't let a little thing like being thrown down-stairs discourage him. He's persistent, there's that to be said for him."

"Well, do you like him any better than you did?"

"He's not a bad sort."

It was true that Felix was not jealous, though perhaps not for precisely the reasons he supposed. In truth, his egotism could not tolerate his being weighed in the balance with another. He would not, in the Emersonian phrase which even now flashed into his mind, have wished to "detain her garment's hem," if she wanted to go to the arms of another. He did not suspect such a thing, but it was for her to say. He asked coldly:

"Why don't you marry him?"

She said as if jokingly, "If I marry anybody, I'd rather it would be you!"

He thrilled at her words. But — was it some relic of masculine conventionalism in him which required that he be the one to make such a proposal?

"Isn't it a pity," he said lightly, "that I don't believe in marriage!"

"And there we are!" said Joyce cheerfully.

4

They were going up the long hill toward Vanderdecken Park. Felix began again to explain his views on marriage. He had qualified them now to a point where they were, if one looked closely, scarcely distinguishable in substance from those of any idealistic person, however conventional. He merely did not want a dull and stodgy marriage, a tame and settled marriage, a J. H. kind of marriage. But he did not make this distinction particularly clear; perhaps because he did not really want to. And he continued to speak of marriage in a general way, as though he were viewing it across a vast distance. His manner gave the effect of as-

tronomical remoteness to whatever intentions he might himself have cherished. He might have been speaking of the precession of the equinoxes. . . .

"I wonder if I'm just a coward?" Joyce said softly.

She had been thinking of another and more immediate aspect of their problem.

He turned to her, and repeated the formula which he had used the other evening. "You will do whatever you think is right."

"I'm not so sure of that," she said. "Not sure enough to spend another evening at the cabin with you — just now."

"Listen," he said tenderly. "You know I love you. But until it is not only your body, but your soul that is convinced of our right to have each other, I will help you to be what you think you ought to be."

She pressed his fingers tightly and drew him down on a little bench in the shadows just inside the park. Still holding fast to his hand, she said in a shaken voice and a brave attempt at her old intransigent manner: "That sounds very noble, Felix, and I ought to be impressed. But in spite of it, I'm afraid of you. Don't make fun of me, Felix; but I think you are doing something to my mind — something really wrong, worse even than if you — than if you just seduced my body. Perhaps that doesn't make any difference. . . . I've not told you, Felix, one — one thing in my past. I'm not"— she smiled with an uncertain whimsicalness —"technically pure. But it hasn't hurt me. I've forgotten it. I would never have spoken of it to any one but you. It was just — dare-deviltry. It didn't mean anything. I'm not that kind of person. Truly, I'm not. I want to be good. I want to belong to one person always — all of me, and for ever. If I should give myself to you, Felix, it would be a marriage to me. I would want to believe that it was for always."

Felix had the impulse to draw her to him and kiss her and tell her that it didn't matter. . . . But his mind espied a flaw in her logic, and in the shaken moment that followed

her revelation, the proud unwillingness to attach any emotional importance to her confession, gave his mind the mastery over his feelings. He caught up her last words. "For always," he repeated calmly. "Are you sure that you didn't think the same thing that other time?"

"Oh, I did!" she cried.

"Well, you see —"

She saw, and covered her face with her hands.

"You see that it is no use to make promises to oneself and others that can't be kept," he said with quiet finality. He took her hand again. "Today you think this of me. Tomorrow —"

She tugged to get her hand away, but he held it fast. "Give me back my hand," she said. "How can you sit there and say such horrible things, and hold my hand as if you loved me? You don't love me. Or you couldn't believe such things. Just because —. I'm sorry I told you," she concluded mournfully.

"Don't be sorry," he said gently. "You have told me nothing except that you are a human being. I didn't think you were an angel-doll."

"But you think," she said sadly, "that I wouldn't be faithful to you."

"I don't want you to be 'faithful' to me," he said, with a contemptuous emphasis on the word. "I want you to be faithful to your own soul."

"That," she said, drawing her hand quietly away from him, and speaking in a sombre tone, "is a strange thing for a man to say to a girl. . . . You don't want me to be faithful to you. . . ." Then she rose and said in an ordinary cheerful tone, "Come on, let's go home."

He rose. "You are deliberately misunderstanding me," he said angrily.

She took his arm. "I understand you well enough," she said. "And I like you, Felix. But we were mistaken, that's all. I thought we were kind of alike. But we're not. I have a devil in me, it's true. But it's a careless,

warm-hearted devil; and the devil that is in you is cold — cold and cruel. And I'm not going to let you torture me any more. Come along!"

"As you say!" They walked a long time in silence. "Am I to understand that you don't want to see me any more?" he asked at last.

"Why, what gave you that idea?" she replied, startled.

"I thought —"

"You're a foolish boy. I don't mean everything I say. And I don't think you do, either. Let's not be foolish children. Kiss me, Felix."

"And when," he said at her doorstep, "am I to see you again?"

"Tomorrow," she said. "No — not tomorrow." She looked him in the eyes. "J. H. is coming tomorrow evening. But the evening after. Come for me right after dinner, and we'll go to the Cabin again."

5

Going home, he wondered why he had said those things to her. He shook his head, ashamed of his cruelty. . . . But at the same time he felt a glow of triumph. A girl who had just confessed to being as — as humanly inconstant as she had been, was scarcely in a position to lecture him on eternal fidelity; and he had just not been able to resist pointing it out. Still, he need not have been so brutal. . . .

It was as if there was a subterranean struggle between their natures; a struggle in which he wished to be eventually defeated by her; eventually, yes — but in the meantime, he was the master!

XLIV Truce

I

ONE evening two weeks later, Joyce and Felix were reading a new, much talked of, American novel. They had started to read it one rainy evening when they had to stay at home in Uncle Jim's parlour; and they had been so interested in it that they had brought it with them to the Cabin, where they were now lying prone on the floor, side by side, in the lamp-light, turning its last pages. Felix read faster, a little, than Joyce, and his thumb and finger held the edge of the penultimate leaf, ready to turn. He was looking at Joyce's face, at the little puckered frown with which she read. She finished the page, her intent eyes lifted for a moment and she smiled at him. He quickly turned the page, and they read the final words of the story together.

He closed the book and sat up, and she laid her head in his lap. He lit a cigarette. "Light me one, too, Felix," she said.

"Well, I don't think that's such a wonderful book," said Felix.

She thoughtfully blew a cloud of smoke up toward the ceiling. "I don't think the love part was *true*," she said. "Why is it that love in books is never anything like what it is in real life?"

Felix mused. "It isn't merely that they don't call a spade a spade," he said. "They say, 'the cool, sweet rain-drenched loam felt a steely shiver of anticipation.'"

"They just don't tell the truth," insisted Joyce. "They leave out things — important things."

"They have to," said Felix. "Reality is improper."

"But it's so much more interesting," said Joyce.

"Yes," said Felix. "When I was a boy, and began to read books to try to find out something about life, I remember that I was always impatient of the way they wrote about love. For grown-up people, people who knew all about it, what they said might mean something; but it didn't tell me anything. And the supposedly naughty books were worse than the others; they gave a false view of everything. For instance, the lovers in such books never thought about such a thing as babies. They simply didn't happen."

"Mm," said Joyce. "Except when the man went off to Australia or somewhere, and then the girl found that she was going to have one."

"That possibility hadn't occurred to the man!" said Felix. "And you were left in the dark as to whether they were unfortunate, or reckless, or just plain ignorant."

"But you can't write about things like that," said Joyce.

"No, but you could give an idea, it seems to me, that your lovers are living in a real world, and that love isn't just a delirium of raptures and roses. You can make your lovers real people, with a sense of responsibility toward each other, instead of a couple of poetic savages. . . . Of course, within the limitations of reality, love *is* a poetic and savage thing. . . . Mmm?"

"Mmmm!"

They looked deep into each other's eyes.

"Sweetheart!"

"Darling!"

"At least," said Joyce, "the old books leave you something to find out for yourself. . . ."

"The most beautiful of secrets," said Felix.

"And an end to arguing!" said Joyce. "No more old intellectual debates! No more Advanced Sociology! Just Us!"

2

Nevertheless, though the change in their relationship had simplified the problem of their spiritual adjustment, it had also intensified it in a peculiar way, of which neither of them was as yet consciously aware. In a sense they seemed to have exchanged spiritual attitudes with each other. It was true, there was no more debate about "freedom." She had accepted his theories with a suddenness and completeness that startled him. Gone, apparently, were her fears, forgotten her old-fashioned conventional ideas of "honesty." She did not talk of freedom — she lived it, fearlessly and laughingly. And now it was Felix who had secret qualms of conscience. . . .

If she did not bother any more about what Uncle Jim thought, Felix did; and when he interviewed that jocund personage in his office, or as sometimes happened, smoked a cigar in the library with him while he was waiting for Joyce, the generous confidence which was implicit in the older man's attitude toward his niece's suitor rather shook his Nietzschean morale. Felix was really ashamed of himself. He was behaving like a thief and a liar; he was, in very truth, a thief and a liar. In vain he reassured himself that Joyce did not "belong" to anybody but herself, and that she had given herself freely; but however true that might be in the realm of pure theory, it wasn't somehow true of Joyce. She did "belong"— as a child to her uncle; and as a woman she had become his by a very shady transaction — or so Felix in deadly secret felt it to be. He did not confide these doubts to Joyce; her attitude was too apparently whole-hearted an acceptance of the situation to warrant his doing so. Indeed, he scarcely confessed these things to himself. But his impulse now was all for making his title clear. The only thing in the way was his economic situation, and even more than that, his economic timidity. He hated to think in such terms, but it was true that the question of money did enter into their love. . . .

Not that Joyce seemed to care about money; but the very vivacity and zest with which she exploited the possibilities of the little Cabin suggested to Felix the delight she would take in managing a real house, not in any sense as its drudge, but magnificently as its mistress. One could doubtless *exist* upon such small means as he might provide: but one could not live and enjoy life, as she did, except upon an increasing scale of expensiveness which it would have made Felix proud to plan for except that it frightened him to think of. And how she did enjoy life! She enjoyed their domesticity with a pleasure that was luxurious and intense. To cook a meal was a sybaritic adventure. In the Cabin she anticipated in miniature the life she would live in a house of her own.

It was no mere rendezvous for illicit love-making. It was her home. . . .

She was amazing, in the ease and simplicity with which she put on secret wifehood — amazing and beautiful, and to one who in spirit still lingered perturbedly upon the threshold of intimacy, rather terrifying. To Felix this relationship was a wonderful and surprising experience, and its newness lasted. Every unaccustomed gesture of her bare arms as she coiled her yellow hair about her head or twisted and knotted her stockings beneath subtly-modelled knees, was a revelation; every phase of their intimacy a bewildering felicity. But to her it seemed to be less a miracle than simply the most natural thing in the world. She had no sense of personal proprietorship over her own body — it was as if it belonged to him rather than to herself, as though it had meaning for her only in such possession by him. She was utterly unashamed. . . .

To Felix, sex was a mysterious and rather sacred theme, to be discussed impersonally in scientific terms, or solemnly and beautifully in poetic paraphrase. He regarded jokes upon that theme as vulgar. He had to learn from her lips that it was possible to be frivolous or merry upon that subject as upon any other; but it was a hard lesson. His in-

tellectual convictions about women had not quite prepared him for her apocalyptic self.

He was not candid with her about his feelings; for once, when he had merely hinted at them to her, she had laughed delightedly and said, "You are the Puritan in this family, Felix!" He ingeniously and elaborately proved to her that she was mistaken, and made no further confessions. But it was true. His conscience irked him. Their secrecy seemed ignoble. And their "freedom" which only meant an absurd separation of each other from day to day, had not in fact the glamour it shone with in theory. He knew that their secret bondage united them as truly as a conventional marriage; and it was the secrecy, and not the bondage, which he resented.

And freedom, as it worked out, had another objectionable feature. It meant that she still permitted the attentions of J. H. He had encouraged her to do so, in strict accord with his theoretic position; but he did not like it. The reason he assigned, in his private thoughts, for this apparent inconsistency, was the fact that she did not seem to really *want* to play around with J. H. If she really wanted to, all right; she was free to do so: he scorned the antique notion of possessiveness. But she didn't really want to — so she said. Well, then, why did she?

The situation would undoubtedly have been much simpler if Joyce had only realized that she was free to — *stop* playing with J. H. But she seemed to want to be told to stop. It was some time before Felix realized this. The idea knocked and knocked at his consciousness before he let it in. Was it possible that she was flaunting J. H. and his flowers and motor-rides in order to force him to tell her that it wouldn't do?

Dimly he realized the meaning of that strange gesture of defiance. She wanted him to admit that she was his, to have and to hold, to keep and guard, to make decisions for, to command with Yea and Nay. . . . There was a terrific and frightening sweetness in the thought.

XLV Opportunities

I

FELIX had, from the first meeting with Joyce, neglected his work. Or rather, the naïve curiosity with which he had been seeing the daily scene of life for two years, and which was so easily transmuted through the medium of words into a constant succession of "stories" for his paper, seemed to be vanishing. He was hardly aware of its passing; his energies were flowing so tremendously into the single channel of a personal relationship, that nothing else seemed to matter. For so long he had been unaware of any effort in the production of the work for which he received his pay, that it had come to seem a mere reaction to living; and now that the necessity for conscious effort had come, he was almost incapable of it. He did not feel the change as something in himself; he only thought that there were fewer stories to be written than usual. He turned out his regular criticisms of the summer stock-company performances; but even in these there was a lack of the humour with which he was accustomed to disguise their philosophical import — they had become stormy, troubled questionings. . . . He was expressing himself, as usual; but what he had to express had suffered a change which made it, as pabulum offered by a daily newspaper to its readers, unpalatable.

Such a thing as a falling-off in the quality of a reporter's work was nothing new to his office; reporters fell in love, or played poker every night for weeks and went about sleepy-eyed and dazed all day, or got drunk too often, or had domestic difficulties that were reflected in an increasing grouchiness; and these things passed. But Rosenthal, the

owner of the paper, had never got over his first grudge against Felix; he still darkly suspected Felix of an animus against the Jews — and the fact that he had been mistaken that first time had only served to bury, and not to kill, his prejudice. Nevertheless, when Rosenthal pointed with scornful finger to Felix's latest alleged dramatic criticism, and said to J. G. in their weekly conference, "What kind of stuff do you call that!"— J. G. defended him and counseled patience. "He's all right," said J. G. "He'll get over this fit, whatever it is." And presently, in truth, the quantity of Felix's work had suddenly increased, and at the same time he seemed to have recovered his old sprightliness of style. J. G., with blue pencil poised over the sheet containing Felix's review of the newest play, sighed with relief, and permitted himself to smile at a funny line, and the blue pencil was restored to its place behind his ear. "He's getting over it," said J. G.

2

But rumours percolate easily from one newspaper office to another, and when Felix was walking through the street one afternoon, the city editor of the *Record* hailed him from his bicycle, descended, stood his wheel against the curb, and invited Felix in to the nearest ice-cream parlour. "I hear," said Madison of the *Record,* "that you are thinking of leaving the *News.* It's none of my business what your motives are, but if you'd like to come to the *Record,* I think we can find a berth for you, and perhaps a little more than you are getting there.— You understand, I'm not trying to get you away from your present job. I'll be perfectly frank with you. Your chances on the *Record* are just the same as they are on the *News;* you might find yourself out of a job the next week. It's merely that if you *are* going to leave, you might try us. There's a vacancy at present. But if you come, you'd better do it pretty quick, because there are some other bright young men who want the place."

Felix thanked him gratefully, and said he would think it

over. . . . He had been unaware that his job on the *News* was in any real danger, though what J. G. had done to his stuff with his blue pencil had finally made him realize that all was not well. At the moment, this offer from the *Record,* flattering as it was, only increased his sense of economic security. If he was worth an offer from the *Record,* his stuff could not have been so bad after all! And he rather hated to make a change; there would be different conditions to deal with; old Watkins, the owner of the *Record,* had a bad reputation for firing reporters — if he didn't like an article, out went the man who wrote it, without argument. What was the use of giving up a good job for something uncertain?

Of course, there was the better pay. It was worth thinking about.

The next day he ran across Deems Morgan, and discussed the matter with him. Deems told him, as one who knows, that he, Felix, had been within an ace of being fired last week. "Better take the job," he advised. . . . But that information gave the situation a new aspect. If it was true that he had been almost fired, then it was true that his work was not up to the mark, editorially. And if so, then this was scarcely the time to meet the challenge of new conditions. . . .

Felix was a little surprised at his own timidity. Last winter, he knew, he would have accepted the opportunity with enthusiasm. Why should he be so diffident about it now, especially — especially since it fitted in so well with his desire to get married! For with a little bigger salary, he could consider realistically the idea of supporting a wife. He had been secretly afraid that with her bringing up, he would never be able to support Joyce properly; and perhaps, in some dim way which he was far from understanding, there was a strange relief for him in his inability to do so. But with more money and a new job, he would have to come down from his theoretical high-horse and commence to think about the rent of an apartment and a domestic

budget for two. . . . There was a thrill in facing that prospect; but the truth was, he was a little afraid of it.

3

It was a question which he would have to consider carefully. He called up Joyce on the telephone. He had no engagement with her that evening; and, though he had carefully refrained from asking, doubtless she was permitting the attentions of the objectionable J. H. But he wanted to see her, to talk with her about the *Record* offer.

As he stood there in the telephone booth waiting for his number, he realized suddenly that once he talked to Joyce, it was all over but the actual ceremony of marriage; and *that* they would commence to plan tonight! He realized it with a vast relief. Of course! What was the use of pretending? They were already married, and their talk tonight would be merely to arrange for a public and ceremonial acknowledgment of the fact. . . .

"Hello!" She was on the wire.

"Can I come up this evening?"

"Why — you know I've another engagement, Felix."

"Oh, well — I guess this can wait, then."

"Is it something important? I can put off this other —"

"Not so very important, I guess. It can be put off just as well."

"If you say so, Felix, I'll — I'll telephone J. H. he can't come. I would just as soon. If you want me to."

There it was again: *If you want me to!* Why must everything be done in the light of a favour to him?

"Do just as you want to."

"But I want to do what you *want* me to."

That same strange, unending struggle, in which she sought only the privilege of obeying — a struggle in which she would be the victor if he consented to accept the direction of her destinies. Almost she won, in this moment. Ahead everything lay so smooth and simple. That talk — and an end of separation — a life together!

But no, he would not surrender.

"I want you to do what *you* want to do." He was very stern about it. Damn it all, if she really loved him as much as she said, couldn't she break a date with another man on her own initiative?

"You see, he was going to take me out in the car. But if you say so—"

"I think," said Felix, "that you really want to go with him. Good-bye."

And when they met the following evening, he was sufficiently estranged not to want to tell her. He felt that it would serve her right if he let the opportunity slip. . . . Nevertheless he had a plan. He would ask for a raise, and if he didn't get it, he would take the job on the *Record*.

He did ask for the raise. And when he confided as much to her, there was a beautiful look in her eyes, instantly shut off as she looked away and began to talk about something else.

4

Felix did not hear about his raise immediately, and he began to be worried for fear he was letting the *Record* opportunity pass by: Madison had said, "If you come, you'd better do it pretty quick." Well, he would wait one more day. . . .

He waited two. And in the evening, after covering a stupid assignment, came back cursing himself for the folly of such delay. He was going to the office and write the story, and then call Joyce up and tell her everything. . . . The building was deserted, but he had the key. It was late when he called up her house, but her voice answered. And it was she, not he, who presently spoke about the question so much on his mind. "Have you—" and then there was a click, and a blurring of her voice, and she had to speak louder: "Have you heard anything about your raise yet?" And he said, "No, not yet—those dollars are a very im-

portant matter to the old Jew, and he'll have to think for ever about it. But I want —"

"I can't hear very well," she said. "Somebody's listening in, I think. *Get off the wire, please!*"

There was another click, and then her voice came clearly. . . .

Felix had a grim presentiment, and as he hurried down the stairs a few minutes later he passed old Rosenthal coming out of the business office — Rosenthal with a malignant look in his eye and no answer to Felix's polite greeting. . . .

Felix went over the first thing in the morning to the *Record:* Madison was very sorry, they had just filled that place yesterday. "If I had only known you wanted it! — I'll tell you; you might keep in touch with us, anyway." Sotto voce: "A little later, maybe . . .!"

Felix went back to his office, and received the news that he had been discharged, to take effect immediately — by special orders from Mr. Rosenthal.

"Fired," said Felix to himself, "for insulting a Jew!"

He went out, smiling at the tawdry irony of circumstance.

XLVI Economics

I

FELIX told Joyce about his bad luck; but he did not tell her just how bad it was. She showed a disposition to be motherly and comforting, which he sternly checked. He told her that it really did not matter.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I really think there's a good chance of my getting on the *Record*," he said, "and I'm going to wait for it."

"How long do you think that will be?"

"Oh, a month or so."

"You're sure you won't — get discouraged and want to go to Chicago?"

"Why Chicago?"

"Oh, to get another newspaper job. Of course, if you're sure of this one —"

"I'm pretty sure of it. Madison really wants me. And I sha'n't get discouraged, because I shall be doing something else in the meantime. I shall have to — I can't afford to loaf."

"Something else? What?"

"I don't know. It's doesn't make any difference. Anything to keep me busy. I'll look around."

She applauded his resolution, and he went forth to look for a job. He went first to an advertising firm, with the idea that his newspaper experience might be of value there. And there was said to be good money in advertising; perhaps on the whole it would be better than newspaper work. But there appeared to be no opening. He did not know what to try next. Tentatively he went to a store, a big department store, and asked to see the advertising manager.

That personage seemed unexpectedly willing to consider Felix as an applicant for the position of assistant advertising writer. "We've been thinking," he said, "of trying something new and original — different — in the way of advertising." He did not say that the business was on the road to bankruptcy and that its worried department heads were willing to consider, at least for a moment, almost anything. "Can you draw pictures? — I don't mean regular pictures, but something odd? Or write jingles — stuff with rhymes, you know?"

Felix admitted an ability in the latter direction.

"Suppose you do us a pome about our Persian rugs," he said. "Just to look at."

Felix wandered about the store, and then went to the nearest little park and wrote the "rug pome," together with half a dozen other airy jingles upon various other articles of merchandise, somewhat in the Mother Goose style. He remembered reading a story by Richard Le Gallienne in which a poet rose from starvation to affluence by writing just such trifles. . . . He brought the verses to the store, and was asked to leave them and call next day. He did so. The advertising manager had decided not to employ him; but he might use the verses, he said, and in any case wanted to pay him for his trouble — and so saying he gave Felix seventy-five cents.

That, at least, was funny, and Joyce laughed over it when he told her. She now affected the same lightness that he had insisted upon in his first announcement of his immediate plans; it did not seem to matter. She appeared to be certain that he would turn up something good in a day or two. But Felix was secretly not so sure of that now. And after a few more discouraging adventures in the upper regions of the employing world, he turned his attention to the factories.

He really did not mind working in a factory, he told himself, since it would only be for a while — it would, in fact, enrich his experience, and give him something more to write

about when he came to do his novel. He was commencing to think about his novel again. . . . But there seemed to be no jobs in the factories, though he went to every one in which he could by any stretch of fancy conceive himself as employable.

He hated to go back to Joyce every other evening with the news that he had failed. The weather added to his discomfort, for it was rainy and gloomy, and in the evenings he had to sit with Joyce in Uncle Jim's parlour, instead of playing outdoors, or going to the Cabin. He was too impatient to read to her, and somehow he did not feel in the mood for love-making. She would sit sewing on some dress that she was making, and he slouched moodily beside her on the sofa. And then the first clear evening of the week came, and he wanted to go to the Cabin. But he did not want to suggest it. . . . He felt somehow that he was not in a position to take the lead in amatory enterprise. Truth to tell, deep beneath his conscious thoughts, he was experiencing a feeling of relief that their love-making had not so far led to any desperate consequences; and he was not at the moment willing to undertake the responsibility for future possibilities. He was more discouraged than he was aware. His first confidence had been genuine enough; but the effect of being refused employment day after day was undermining his egotism; and at the bottom of his heart, unacknowledged even to himself, was a profound disbelief in his economic success. He no longer consoled himself with the thought of that job on the *Record;* he had simply ceased to hope for it. The manhood he had acquired by virtue of easy success during the past two years had given way at the first touch of hostile reality, and he was again utterly and hopelessly a child — a lost child, groping in the darkness, and afraid to admit his fears. . . . His childishness reflected itself in his attitude toward Joyce; she felt, though she did not understand, his lack of enterprise toward her. She had idealized and doubtless exaggerated his boldness; and now she saw only that in some way, of his own

volition, he had ceased his courtship of her. At first she thought it was because he was worrying about the loss of his position; but she took his prospects at their face value, and did not understand why he should be so dour. He was acting strangely. She was unexpectedly patient. But beneath her patience was pride — and sensitiveness. So, when he waited for her to make some advance, he waited in vain. She continued to sew on her frock, and they spent a clear evening most inexcusably, as it seemed to both of them, in the stuffy parlour.

He talked to Joyce a little about his novel — the novel he wanted to write. He did not tell her how much it had begun to occupy his thoughts. It was with him, now, every moment. As he went from employer to employer, tramping the streets or waiting in offices, he was seeing its scenes unfold in his mind. It had become suddenly real; it took form, unfolded itself with what seemed to Felix a rhythmic splendour of incident, in his imagination. . . . He wanted, with a kind of nostalgia, to write that novel. But he continued to look for a job.

It was perhaps no accident that in the imagined novel a revolutionary young hero was dealing masterfully with circumstances in general, and with a young woman of the bourgeoisie in particular, in just the way that Felix was finding it impossible to do in real life. . . .

In the course of his search for work, he went to the government arsenal on Stone Island, and interviewed the Commandant — whom he remembered having met socially one evening, a year or more ago, at the home of one of his bourgeois friends. The Commandant bespoke him courteously enough, to the usual effect. . . . But something in the military manner of that official annoyed Felix; his air somehow placed the dusty applicant in the vast category of the utterly unimportant. And though that might be philosophically just, Felix was not willing to be so disposed of by a man in uniform. "A superior doorkeeper!" he said to himself, and tramped home angrily. As he went, a line from Mar-

lowe's Tamburlaine came into his head — a line that was a promise of the victory of the humble shepherd over the captains and kings of earth; and he repeated it to himself, until it changed into a song:

Shepherd of thoughts, by day and night
My watch upon the hills I keep;
The captains scorn me, passing by —
A simple tender of the sheep.
But scorn for scorn I give them back,
And in my heart I think of this —
They shall bow low when I shall ride
In triumph through Persepolis!

Having effected this poetical revenge upon the unsuspecting military man, Felix with renewed self-respect continued his search. But he found no job.

He had been engaged in these fruitless and discouraging efforts for three weeks when Tom Alden returned from his visit to Chicago.

2

Tom was uncommunicative upon the subject of "the girl in Chicago." But he was bubbling over with talk about a lot of other things. She, it seemed, had not been the sole event of his visit. People, old friends and new, writers and adventurers in life and thought, talked with for long hours at the Press Club, were the chief theme of Tom's enthusiastic reminiscence.

Felix had never been particularly interested in Chicago; he had never understood why Deems Morgan, for instance, looked forward so romantically to the time when he should go there. But seeing Chicago through Tom's eyes, Felix now envisaged it as a place of all places where one like himself could be happy.

In Port Royal there was only himself and Tom; in Chicago there were many like them, a golden fraternity. Felix saw as a living and contemporaneous reality the fantasy of the Vagabondia lyrics —

"Midnights of revel
And noon-days of song!"

XLVII Escape

I

YES, Chicago must be a wonderful place. . . . Felix was finding it increasingly hard to go to Joyce with his perpetual tale of failure. Not that she reproached him; but somehow he knew that she expected him each time unfailingly to bring better news, and concealed her disappointment. Not, of course, that it really mattered so much if he were idle a month or so; he knew, even if she didn't, that such things must sometimes happen. If it had not been for what he felt to be her unspoken demand, he would have dropped his search for a while, and loafed; but she was in some queer way his conscience. With her looking on, he must keep on trying. It did not so much signify that he succeeded, as that he did not cease to try. . . . She would never know how much he hated to ask for work — how much loathing and shame and hate he had to overcome to make that simple request each time from an indifferent employer; nor how much the inevitable failure unnerved him when it happened.

It was pleasanter to be with Tom, at this period, than with Joyce. After one brief discussion of his economic situation, in which the only advice that Tom had to offer was to have another drink anyway, the subject was never mentioned. In the world which he inhabited with Tom, there was no such thing as needing a job; there was no such word as *fail* in the bright lexicon of their discourse. They inhabited a region of ideas and boon-companionship. Tom did not meet him with an unspoken question in his eyes as to whether he had established himself in the world of economic usefulness. Tom had not established himself in that world. It was several years since he had written anything

for money. The legacy from a relative upon which he had subsisted during this time was almost exhausted. He too was poor; but what he had was his friend's. He had never really cared about making a living; and now that he was alone, with no woman about to remind him of worldly values, he had ceased to pretend to care. His companionship was an escape for Felix from the more exigent world of reality in which Joyce, by her very presence, bound him fast.

"It's devilish hot in this garret," he said one day to Felix, who was communing with him instead of tramping the streets in search of non-existent jobs. "Let's go out in the country."

"Where?" asked Felix.

"I'll show you," said Tom. "We've just time to catch the four o'clock train."

2

The train carried them outside the city a few miles to a village, and a little beyond it Tom pointed out what seemed from the distance to be a tiny abandoned farm.

"I tried to raise chickens here one summer," said Tom, as they walked along the road toward the place. "Not with great success. It was left to me," he explained, "by my aunt, together with an old negro servant who had been in the family for years. He's here, too."

"Left you a negro servant?" said Felix, puzzled.

"Sort of. It's understood that he's to stay here and take care of the place for me. Sometimes, when I come here and run things, and there's any work to do, he gets paid real money. I keep thinking I'll rent another patch of land, and go in for truck-farming. We'll see whether he's let the place go completely to rack and ruin.— There he is, puttering around in the garden. Hello, Ned!"

The ancient figure straightened up, with a welcoming flash of white teeth, took off his hat, and came down to the gate to meet them. "Howdy, Mist' Tom! Howdy! Ah

was jes' thinkin' it was time fo' you to be comin' down."

"This is my friend Felix. How's your rheumatism, Ned?"

"Howdy-do, Mist' Felix. Not so bad jes' now, Mist' Tom."

"How are the cabbages this year?"

"Pretty po'ly, Mist' Tom. Bad yea' fo' cabbages. But Ah think Ah c'n fix yo'-all a nice dish of strawberries."

"You didn't forget to set them over this time?"

"No, suh. An' they's some mighty nice-lookin' chickens, too. How would yo' like some fried chicken fo' supper?"

"Not a bad idea. I'll take a look around the place with you later. You can go and kill a chicken for us now."

"Yes suh, Mist' Tom. Yes, suh." And Ned went off briskly in the direction of the hen-houses.

"The house certainly needs some paint," said Tom. "And if there's anything in that garden, you can't see it for the weeds.— What do you think of it?"

"I don't see why you live anywhere else!" said Felix.

"I wonder that, too," said Tom, "whenever I get back here. But after I've been back for a while, I realize why it is I never stay here. . . . Loneliness."

"Of course," said Felix doubtfully.

"I don't think you've ever known real loneliness," said Tom. "You've known it only as a sense of *wanting* people. But when I have it, it comes to me as a conviction that there *aren't* any people. It's a black abysm into which I sink further and further — until I rescue myself from the thought of suicide by going back to town. It's a pity — I like this place."

Tom led Felix into the house, and into a little room with a fireplace, and a shelf of books meandering about from wall to wall. He went up fondly to an old desk, upon which some dusty papers lay, apparently undisturbed for a year. "Here's where I wrote my first novel," he said. "I have a fancy that I can write better at this desk. Whenever I see it, I want to write again." He rested his hands upon

it, as though to receive its influence like an electric fluid. "I can see my new book taking shape already," he said whimsically.

"Why don't you stay here and write it?" asked Felix.

"I ought to stay here," said Tom. "And get things in order. Roxie may be coming out here next year. . . . It's too late in the season to do anything about truck-farming now, but I could make my plans for next year, and get things straightened out. And write. Yes, I've every excuse this summer for writing a novel."

"Do," urged Felix.

"The only trouble is — lack of society," said Tom.

"I forgot that," said Felix.

"Come on, I'll show you around. There's a beautiful woods beyond."

3

After dinner, as they sat smoking in the little room with the desk and books, Tom said thoughtfully, "Why don't you write a novel, Felix?"

Felix flushed with pleasure. "I'd like to," he said. "I have a theme in mind. But —" he hesitated.

"You're looking for a job. Is that it?"

"Yes."

Tom smoked a while. "The only job you are particularly interested in is the newspaper one, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well," said Tom, "here's my idea. You come out here and stay with me this summer, and we'll both write our novels. If anything turns up that you want, you can take it. If not, you'll have your novel done. And you'll make it possible for me to do mine — to start it, anyway. What do you say?"

The invitation was immensely attractive to Felix. He could not conscientiously accept it outright; he talked of the likelihood of something turning up within the next few weeks on the *Record;* but he agreed to come out "for a

while." Having thus salved his conscience, he entered with Tom into a fascinating discussion of the technique of the novel, and what they respectively wanted to do in their forthcoming works, which lasted far into the night.

4

Felix went to town the next noon with Tom, planning to return with him that evening. He explained to Alice that he was going to spend a month in the country with Tom Alden. She was impressed and pleased. He explained to Joyce, over the telephone, that he was going to stay with Tom a week. She said "how nice that would be," but Felix felt a lack of approval in her voice.

"Perhaps you can come out and visit us?" he suggested.

"No," she said, "I don't really think I can. I'm going to be busy with the dressmaker."

"Then," he asked, "shall I see you Sunday evening?"

"I expect you will want to stay in the country over Sunday. Better make it Monday evening."

"Very well," he replied.

The conversation ended with "good-bye, dear," but he felt something cold in her manner. Perhaps he should have gone to see her. . . . What was the matter with her lately? They were not like lovers at all any more. Was she disappointed in him? Had she ceased to believe in him? Whatever the reason, their companionship had changed from poetry to prose. . . .

"Are we growing estranged?" he asked himself.

XLVIII Quarrels

I

WHEN Felix saw Joyce on Monday evening he told her that he was going to stay with Tom a while longer, and described with enthusiasm the novels they were planning to write. She was occupied with that damnable sewing again. She made no comment on his projected novel, but said, when he had finished. "You aren't going to stay there while you write all that, are you?"

"Oh, no," said Felix. "After I get a good start, I can work on it at night." But her question rankled. Why should she be so ungenerous about his little holiday? She had quit work herself; but — of course! — that was different. It was all right for her to idle, and wrong for him!

He did not say any of these things, but when a little later she uttered some phrase in slight disparagement of his friend Tom (though it was only the suggestion that writing a novel wasn't precisely getting the place ready for Roxie to live there next year), Felix rushed to his defence.

"It isn't true," he said, "that Tom is an idler! There is a difference between the aristocracy of intellect and mere vagabondage. Tom —"

"Why," she protested, interrupting his eloquence, "I didn't say anything of the sort!"

He realized that her phrase was but meagre evidence, and so he said, "But you don't like him."

She shook her head. "I do like him," she asserted. "I think he's a charming person. But if you want my opinion, I don't think he's the best — influence in the world for you.— Not that it's any of my affair."

It was the first time she had ever criticized him in this way. Always her criticisms had been the protests of a

follower against the rashness of a leader — somewhat as Columbus's seamen might have cried out against his wild notion that the earth was round, while at the same time recognizing that for good or ill they were at his command. But this last speech of hers was as from an infinitely wise person to a wayward child: it was insufferably patronizing.

"What do you mean? In what way is he a bad influence?" He particularly resented the word *influence,* even more than its context. He would almost equally have objected to having his friend called a "good influence." He did not wish to believe that he was being influenced by anybody.

"I didn't say *bad,*" she replied with irritating calmness. "I don't think there is anything bad about him. But I do think he is — weak."

"I haven't the slightest idea what you mean," he returned. "But it is perfectly clear that you regard me also as a weak character."

"Well, not exactly!" She laughed, and looked at him with a flash of her old affectionate humour. But he maintained an impassive demeanour. "You don't try to understand me, Felix," she complained. "You're quarrelling with my words, picking at everything I say!"

"Well, suppose you try to say what you do mean," he insisted.

"I've forgotten *what* I meant, now," she replied in an annoyed tone. "What is the difference, anyway!"

"That's another thing," he said slowly. "*What's the difference!* And: *It's none of my affair!* What am I to understand by those remarks?"

"Well, what do you understand by them?" she countered defiantly, biting a thread.

"If they mean anything at all, they mean that you do not wish to concern yourself with my affairs."

"I thought that was what you believed in, Felix — perfect freedom. What right have I to criticize you?" and she bent over her sewing.

"And that means," he said, "that you do wish to criticize me."

"Does it?" she asked quietly. "Well, since you're such a mind-reader, you might go on and tell me what I ought to criticize you for. You must have something on your conscience."

"I'm not aware of anything on my conscience," he said challengingly. "Are you?"

"Not unless it's your bad manners."

"What's the matter with my manners?" He was flushing. If it had been his morals that stood in question, he would have been indignant, rather than alarmed and uneasy. His manners, such as they were, had been too recent an acquisition for him to bear such a charge with equanimity.

"I merely meant, Felix," she said with exasperated patience, "that it's not supposed to be good manners to sit and deliberately quarrel with the girl you are calling on."

"You should say," Felix corrected her bitterly, "the *young lady* I am calling on."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I admit," he said painfully, "that my manners are crude. But they used to please you well enough."

"They certainly haven't improved since you've been staying with your friend Tom," she flashed.

"Tom once more!" he observed.

"That, evidently, is a sacred subject," she said. "Common people must not criticize Tom."

"They can criticize him all they want to," said Felix, "if they'll just say what they mean. What I can't stand is this avoidance of anything specific. So far as I can make out, you say that Tom is a bad influence upon me — particularly upon my manners. I should think the contrary would be the case, myself. But if you'll just tell me one single thing in which I have transgressed, presumably under his influence, I'll try to amend it."

"I think this is a silly conversation," she said.

"So do I. But if you will just tell me —"

"Oh! — well, if you must, then I think you might have some regard for the opinion of my relatives, and my own position here. You come to see me looking like a tramp."

Felix glanced down at his clothes. He had walked in that afternoon with Tom, and his shoes were covered with dust. His shirt was open at the throat for coolness' sake, and his necktie was in his pocket, where he had stuffed it on the journey. He took out the necktie with so shame-faced an air that she laughed and came over and kissed him and knotted the tie for him. "That's better!" she said.

"I'm sorry," said Felix. "But I don't think you really ought to blame it on Tom."

She suddenly became angry. "Oh, confound Tom! I'm sick of hearing about him!"

Her voice had risen, and there was a lull in the talk in her uncle's library. "We mustn't let them hear us quarrelling," she whispered. "Come on, let's go out for a walk."

2

But that — which he set down gloomily in his mental record as their first quarrel — was a mere prelude to the discords which followed, as Felix came in on successive Monday evenings. He had had to provoke her to criticism that time; but subsequently it seemed that she needed no provocation. It was not only his manners, his clothes, his forgetfulness, his indifference to what other people thought — it was his whole attitude toward life that came under the casual but stinging lash of her words. And when he defended himself, as eloquently as of old when they had their fierce debates, she was unmoved. She would only smile cruelly, and say, as on one occasion, "I'm afraid that's not a very practical view."

Of course it wasn't practical! It was what the whole world called impractical, visionary, mad. But since when had he given her any right to expect him to look at things from the world's point of view? She knew what he was

like. . . . And there had been a time when she loved him for being that way. "I like crazy people," she had said. Strange, that she would now quarrel with him for precisely those qualities which had once allured her! She had taken him as her lover because he was what he was. He had not changed. It was she who had changed. . . .

It was not pleasant to come from the glowing fervours of discussion and composition to face this changed and alien creature, who seemed to take pleasure in tormenting him, and who made it up most inadequately by an occasional contrite kiss at his departure. Why did he come? He did not know. He only knew that he must come, if only to receive these hurts. He was in love with her, and must endure what she chose to inflict upon him. . . . But there was something more to it than that. He was vaguely aware that his idyllic existence with Tom would be somehow flavourless without the savour which she, even in such ways as this, provided. These very hurts were something he wanted, something which he must leave his intellectual paradise to come and get. . . . He had to know what she thought of him, however ill it was; and though her criticism seemed sometimes stupidly malevolent, he could not but always take it to heart.

He had never, since that first time, spoken to her of the novel he was writing, except to report progress. He had refrained from speaking of it, as it were in self-defense. It had remained immune from her criticism. But one evening she laid violent hands on that, too. . . .

"How long is your book going to be?" she asked.

He told her he hoped only about seventy thousand words.

"Well," she said, "even seventy thousand words, well interspersed with interesting discussion and tobacco smoke, ought to suffice to keep two good friends going for the summer. Far away," she added, "from the hot uninteresting town."

Felix understood her to be accusing him of using the novel as an excuse for laziness — for not trying to get a

job. He could not reply. But if that was what she thought of him — !

Why did she want so to hurt him? Why should she wish to deal him these wounds? He would never let her know how deep they went. . . . But why was she so cruel? What was the satisfaction she found in thus tormenting him? She was behaving like — and suddenly the phrase came to him — *like a wife!* "Good God!" he thought. "Truly I might as well be married to her!"

"What are you thinking about?" she asked.

"I was wondering why we quarrel this way with each other."

"You and your friend Tom never quarrel, I suppose."

"No."

"I thought not. It must be an ideal existence. I wonder you can bear to come and see me here, ever."

"I wish I could get you to come out and see us," he replied evasively.

"No," she said. "Never. And by the way, how long do you think you will be staying out there?"

"Not much longer," said Felix guiltily. "Why?"

"Because — well, you were only going to stay a week at first, and you've been there nearly two months. That's a pretty long visit. I know your friend Tom is the most hospitable soul in the world, but I think you ought to be careful not to impose on his hospitality."

Felix burned. So that was it. He was letting some one else support him, instead of earning his own living. . . . Well, it was true. What could he say?

"I don't think you quite understand Tom," he began. He was going to tell her that Tom's novel would — or might — be left unfinished if he went away now; that he was, in a sense, doing a favour to Tom by staying. But she rose quickly before he sould say any of these things and cried through clenched teeth, "Please don't tell me anything more about Tom. If you do I shall scream."

Instead she began to laugh, almost hysterically.

XLIX Interim

I

THE next day Felix explained to Tom that he would have to leave him by the end of the month. That would give them two weeks in which to plough through the difficulties under which they were now labouring, after their first confident beginnings; and then they would both have such good starts on their novels that it would be almost impossible for them not to go ahead, under whatever circumstances. Tom accepted the decision without questions, and they set to work with renewed energy; interspersing, so far as Felix could manage it, fewer discussions and less tobacco smoke between the words.

But that decision was not quite enough to set Felix's conscience at rest. The next day he went down to the village and called up Madison on the telephone.

He was convinced that it was no use. But to his surprise he was told that there would be very likely "something doing" in the next few weeks. He would drop Felix a note, he said. . . .

Felix's confidence immediately rose; he began to be impatient of work on the novel, and put in a restless afternoon typing twenty poems and sending them off to a dozen magazines. And when he went down to the village post-office to mail them he found a note from Joyce.

An enigmatic but comforting note!

Dear — I'm sorry I behaved so last night. If you only knew! I cried afterward — if that's any satisfaction to you to know. I'm a silly girl. Please forgive me. J.

He composed an elaborate reply explaining that his feel-

ings had not really been hurt. And at the post-office next day there was another note — the second in a bewildering series that began to arrive daily:

F. F. — I suppose you think I'm all sorts of different persons. But I can't help it. The whole thing is too much for me. I wish you were here. Ever and ever yours, J.

He would have gone to town in response to that appeal except that this was the evening dedicated by recent custom to the offensive J. H.; and even her note did not seem sufficient excuse for interfering with her arrangements of that sort. The next day came this:

Nice letter, F. F. I'm glad you think of me. I'm sorry to have bothered you. It's all right. J. M.

And the next day two more notes. The first one that Felix opened said only:

Forgive me, Felix, I didn't mean it. Truly, Joyce.

Felix did not understand what he had to forgive her for until he opened the second letter, which apparently had been mailed first. It read:

Felix, I think we have been making a great mistake. We don't really love each other. I have been thinking things out, and it seems to me that we have been behaving like wild and reckless children. It has been beautiful, but it isn't love.

Read in their proper order, these notes were rather reassuring. They were better, by far, than the hardness he had had to encounter of late when he went to see her. Being away from her a little was not a bad thing, it seemed — and apparently his letters, with their candid eloquence,

were able to produce an effect upon her which he could not make in person. He knew that when he saw her she would try to ignore the confession of emotional distraction in these letters — she would be calm and cold, and he would have to argue with her. . . . It was better this way.

Besides, he was in the clinch of a literary difficulty; the crucial chapter of his novel was proving damnably hard to do. He felt that if he could put in three more days of uninterrupted work on it, the thing would be done, and the rest would be easy sailing; but if he went in to see her on Monday, he would muddle it.

Still, he was doubtful about putting off his evening with her, until he found at the post-office on Saturday a long and cheerful and gossipy letter from her, about nothing in particular, but seeming to indicate a happy frame of mind: She hoped he was getting lots of work done on "The Novel." She told also of reading various books, including Bernard Shaw's Dramatic Opinions; they reminded her, she said, of the things Felix used to write about plays. She hoped her letters weren't taking his mind from his work; because — she wanted him to know — she was really interested in his work. He must read The Novel to her as soon as he came to a good stopping-place. She sent him many kisses.

Felix felt encouraged to add a postscript to the long letter he had written, saying that as he was just in the middle of a very troublesome chapter, he didn't think he had better come in on Monday. But he wanted to see her very soon.

On Sunday, before she could have received his letter, there were two more missives for him. One was another long and cheerful letter all about books, and Bernard Shaw, and full of funny descriptions of her uncle and aunt, who had just been celebrating their wedding anniversary. . . . The other was an unsigned line:

I need you.

In the same mail was, astonishingly, a letter from the *Century,* accepting two of his poems. He sent on the letter

of acceptance to Joyce, annotating it, "I'll come in some time during week."

That phrase, *I need you,* haunted him all day Sunday, and he had half made up his mind to go in on Monday after all; but on Monday morning there was another note —

Don't let me bother you, Felix. I get lonely sometimes, that's all. I will be awfully glad to see you.

2

So he stayed in the country, and plunged once more into the troublesome chapter. He expected to hear from her about the acceptance of his poem. But there was no letter from her the next day, nor the next. But there came a letter from Madison, saying "Come in to see me Monday." He wrote to Joyce, saying that he would be in town Monday and that he would probably have some news for her.

He received in reply a short queer note in which she said to be sure not to forget to come up Monday evening; and she, too, might have some news — for him.

The chapter got finished, whether well or ill; and Felix was quite ready to stop work on it for a while. He had had a good holiday. By virtue of writing on the novel, he had recovered his working mood — it was an easy transition between the pleasures of dreaming and the discipline of real labour. He had found that novels were hard to write — harder even than newspaper stories; he would be glad to get back to work. And he felt that when once he was at work again, Joyce would be pleasant to him once more. He had a suspicion that it had not been all her fault. . . .

With her last note on the table before him, he put the finishing touches on the chapter in which the radical young workingman triumphantly converts the beautiful daughter of the bourgeoisie to his theories; and the note was no more than a vague reminder that in life, as distinct from fiction, the beautiful daughter of the bourgeoisie is not, even after conversion, as free from ancient slave-woman psychology

as a revolutionary young lover could wish. *Be sure not to forget* — stupid feminine malice! He put the note firmly out of his mind, and wrote the chapter as it should be written.

3

Finished, synchronously with Tom's crucial episode, the chapter was put aside, and on Sunday evening they had a final orgy of talk that lasted until morning. Tom was going to stay in the country and finish his book. Felix promised to come out and visit him sometimes.

"Good luck!" said Tom, and Felix took the train to town.

He saw Madison, who said that all was well. The young man whose place he was to take had been given his *congé,* and Felix could start in to work the following Monday.

"By the way," said Madison, "you write poetry, don't you?"

Felix admitted it.

"Well, here's something you can do in the meantime. We're going to get out a big Port Royal edition, sixty pages, devoted to the history of the town, with pictures of the factories and buildings and business-men and so forth. And we'd like a poem about Port Royal to run in big type, boxed, on the front page. Suppose you do that between now and Monday, eh?"

"All right," said Felix. "I will."

Felix had a faint secret scorn for the idea of writing such a poem, and an immense gratification at having been asked to do it. Somehow it was good to be back in the real world, in which you worked not for some wholly impersonal ideal of art, but for ordinary everyday people. The life that he had been living for the past six weeks seemed to Felix a dream. He was glad to have awaked.

He went home, put on his best clothes, had his shoes shined for the inspection of Joyce's family, if they were so darn interested in his appearance, and after dinner hurried impatiently to her house.

He realized that a single sentence of hers — a cruel sentence — had effected that transformation. To her words, which had so hurt him at the time, was due his going to Madison and getting this job; was due even the sending of his poems to the *Century;* was due the fact that he was back in the real world — with her. . . .

L "And still a Garden by the Water blows"

I

SHE met him at the door with a smile he had not seen for, it seemed to him, ages. "It's too close in the house, let's go out," she said, and taking his arm went gaily down the street. He looked at her, feeding his hungry heart upon her smile, and upon the clear, sweet look in her eyes; he wanted to realize to the full that the change in her had come of itself, and not as a response to his untold news.

"The ice has broken at last," he thought, and he was very glad and proud that he had held his own through the trying time of their immediate past. He had not once asked pity of her. And now she had surrendered. . . .

He told her of his good fortune.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she cried, pressing his hand warmly. "And not only for your sake," she added with a whimsical smile, "but for mine. You know, Felix —"

"Yes?"

"It doesn't improve your disposition a bit to be out of luck. And I did so want you to be nice to me this evening!"

"Was I so grouchy?" he asked.

"Terribly," she laughed. "And — and not only that, Felix, but — oh, well, never mind. It's all over now. You seem to be your real self again. Thank goodness!"

"Poor child!" he said penitently. "I did scold you, didn't I?"

"Oh, it wasn't so much that — I don't mind being scolded a little. I rather like it! Maybe it was that you didn't scold me enough! I mean," she said, "in the old days —

well, we could say what we liked to one another. And we did! We shared all our thoughts. . . ."

"Yes. . . ."

"And then suddenly we didn't. We couldn't talk to one another. . . . I've no doubt it was my fault, too. I didn't tell things — but you started it. . . . You were so —"

"What didn't *you* tell?" he asked.

"Oh, never mind. I'll tell you all about it later."

"Oh, very well — don't tell me if you don't want to."

"Now you're being superior again. Be careful not to spoil my evening. I have a beautiful one planned. Would you condescend to go to the Cabin with me, Mr. Fay?"

"Delighted, Miss Tennant. — But isn't it going to rain? It's been threatening to all day."

"We'll chance it," she said.

2

The rain came when they were half way to their destination. "I don't mind, do you?" she said.

"I like it," he told her. But the rain, which had begun as a soft down-pour of warm drops, changed with the advent of a chilly wind — driving black clouds before it over the face of the sky — into a storm. Blackness descended upon them, and the river frothed whitely under the impact of the wind. Joyce buttoned her coat about her throat, and gripped the steering wheel, holding the nose of the boat against the wind. "We'll make it," she said.

The engine stopped crankily two or three times, but whether with the assistance of Felix's hasty amateur ministrations or of itself, started again in a moment. Once, in the trough of a wave, they touched bottom in the shallow part of the channel as they headed in toward their island; they could feel the grinding of the keel over the pebbly mud. "Safe that time!" cried Joyce, pushing a strand of wet hair out of her eyes with her fist. "Watch the engine!" The next moment they struck again, and the engine stopped, and the next wave, hitting the side of the bow, whirled them

directly about. It was a wild moment, but somehow the engine started once more, and Joyce got the boat back on the course, swearing exultantly between her teeth. Then the wind died down, the waves became less angry, and in a terrific downpour of vertical rain they landed the boat in the cove of Uncle Jim's island.

Felix gathered wet wood outside while Joyce started a fire with what was left over from their last trip. Laughing, they hovered over the hot stove on which their wrung-out garments were draped; and then, reclad and warm, they prepared supper. "Did you realize," she asked, "that we were within an inch — or perhaps an inch and a half —"

"Of Death?" he said. "I suspected it, but I wasn't sure."

"Well, there's an experience for your literary notebook. How one feels in the moment of, and so forth. How did you feel, Felix?"

"I glimpsed the white edge of your face — by that flash of lightning. It was beautiful, with the wet hair all about it. That's all I thought. What did you think about?"

"I thought," she said, "that it would serve me right if it happened. And also that I didn't care. Don't ask me why."

"Why?"

"I told you not to.— What did we have for supper the very first time we were here? Just soup, pork-and-beans, and coffee? I want to have the same things this time. . . ."

Felix got up and shook the lamp. "It's going out," he said, "and we've never remembered to bring any oil. Are there any candles?"

"Look and see. I don't think so. But there's an old kerosene wall-torch somewhere about. It may have a little oil in it."

Felix rummaged. He found no candles, but at last dragged forth the battered "torch." It had oil in it. He hung it on the wall, ready for lighting when the dim lamp should expire.

"Here," said Joyce, "is supper. I'm hungry, aren't you?"

And after supper, when they had lighted cigarettes, she suddenly jumped up and went to her coat, hanging behind the stove, and saying, "Look what I've brought!" drew forth a wet leather-covered copy of the Rubaiyat. It was a gift to her from Felix, and of her own choosing.

"I want you to read to me," she said.

He smiled. "Everybody reads the Rubaiyat to his sweetheart," he said, but took the volume.

"Well, for once," she said wistfully, "for once I'd like you to do what everybody does. For once I'd like to feel like a regular sweetheart with you. I won't ask you again, Felix, ever."

3

She sank down at his feet, and rested her head against his knee, while he read. . . . It was almost too happy a moment.

Felix had expected this sweetness of perfect understanding and careless happiness as of old to come only after explanations, talk, and perhaps their fiercest quarrel. It did not seem as though it could be had at a lesser price. There were too many secret grudges against each other to be healed in an instant, without a word. This peace was strange, too perfect for such troubled living creatures as themselves. It was almost as though they had met in some paradise, after death, with all their mortal doubts and fears and prides burned away from their hearts. He looked down at her quiet face, turning the pages and saying the verses from memory.

Her cigarette dropped from her hand, and burned itself to a film of grey ash on the floor. He read on. The light fluttered, dwindled to a troubled spark, and expired. But Felix knew the poem too well to need the text, and he went on speaking its soft music. At last he reached the final stanza.

"And when like her, O Sáki, you shall pass" . . .

He had fallen under the spell of its melancholy sweetness, and his voice had sunk to a deep-toned whisper; the poem, and the girl at his feet, and the darkness through which came the muffled sounds of the wind and rain, drugged him with their beauty. And he stopped with a sudden indignation, for the girl was laughing, shaking his knee with suppressed laughter.

"Joyce!" he said reproachfully.

She jumped to her feet.

"Light the lamp," she said — and he knew that she had been crying.

"It's gone out," he said stupidly.

"Light the torch then," she directed.

He rose and struck a match. She was wiping her eyes with her handkerchief. He went over to her tenderly, but she pushed him away. "Make a light," she said. "I've got something to tell you."

There was a menace in her tone that shook his hand as he lighted the torch hanging against the wall. Its flame wavered up and down, and the light and shadow flickered and throbbed through the room. He turned and faced her, and still he did not know what she was going to tell him. He only knew that the changing light gave her face a queer, tragic look.

"Listen Felix. I'm going to marry J. H. I promised to last night."

And then it was as if he had known it always.

Of course!

And while the world of his dreams fell shattering about him with a noise that roared audibly in his ears, he took out a cigarette and lighted it with a steady hand.

"Yes?" he said.

LI Past and Present

I

"OH, I hate you!" she cried.

He made a step toward her, and she drew back and crossed her arms as if defensively upon her breast. "I hate you," she said again, and then put her face in her hands, and began to cry. "I'm sorry I came here with you!"

Felix put his arm around her. "Don't hate me," he said. "Just talk to me. Tell me about it, Joyce." He led her to a chair.

"You never loved me at all," she said. "Not one least little bit."

"I do love you," he said. "I love you still."

"You don't!"

"We won't quarrel about that," he said, and took a seat just around the corner of the little table, half facing her. "Tell me — is it because you thought I didn't love you that you — promised to marry J. H.? — Because it isn't true."

She shook her head, and breathed heavily for a moment, while she recovered her composure. "No," she said steadily, "It wasn't that. Not that at all. I've been a fool. I'm sorry. But it wasn't what you think."

"Then you did — know I cared?"

"Yes. I thought you did. That was why I came — — tonight."

"And was this your idea of being — nice to me?"

"No," she said, in a far away tone. "This was my idea of being nice to myself. I wanted one last evening with you. And I wanted to explain."

"Then suppose you do explain."

"I'll — try. But you won't understand."

"Do you love J. H.?"

"Yes."

"And you don't love me any more. Well, that seems explanation enough." He lighted another cigarette. The other one had been crushed and dropped to the floor.

"Yes," she said, "that's simple enough. If it satisfies you."

"So it's true that you don't love me any more?"

"I suppose not. At any rate, I ought not to."

"Why?"

She opened her eyes wider. "Because I've promised to marry J. H."

"But you shouldn't have promised that if — if you still love *me*."

"I didn't say I still loved you. . . ."

"No — you said just now that you hated me. I wonder why?"

"Don't remind me of that, Felix."

"Well?"

"Give me a cigarette."

He lighted it for her.

"Can you forgive me?" she asked. "I mean for bringing you out here and — and pretending that everything was all right."

"Yes," he said, "if you'll tell me why — why everything isn't all right. Why you don't love me any longer."

"In a way," she said, "I do love you. It's funny. It's just like what you've told me. A year ago I would have been shocked at myself, to think of being in love with two men at once. But it's true enough." She blew out a cloud of cigarette smoke. "That's what's been the trouble with me, Felix. I've been in love with you both; and I've had to choose between you."

"I see. And you chose — J. H."

"Yes."

"Because you loved him — more."

"I love him in a different way, Felix. I don't know that you'll understand. . . . It's been lovely with you. But somehow I haven't been able to think of you except — well, on walks, or reading a book to me, or talking, or here in this Cabin. Sort of a playmate. J. H. is different. He appeals to something else in me. . . . Felix: I didn't want to just play always. There's a different side to me, that wants to get married and have a home — and children."

"And you chose J. H. for that."

She raised her eyebrows. "You aren't exactly cut out to be a husband, are you, Felix? You wouldn't want to be tied down to a home and children."

"You think I — didn't want to get married?"

"I knew you didn't believe in marriage. I suppose you would have married me if I had wanted you to. But that wasn't the kind of love ours was. It was an outdoor, holiday sort of love. It was an adventure — for both of us."

"I suppose it — was," said Felix.

"A beautiful adventure," she said softly.

"And what will J. H. think of your little adventure?" he asked grimly.

"He'll never know," she said quietly.

"You'll — lie to him."

"We've had that out, Felix. Yes, I'll lie to him, if you want to call it that. He will never know. And I will forget. . . . He wants me to be a certain sort of person. And I will be that sort of person, for him."

"You will be — the Perfect Wife?" asked Felix satirically.

"Don't make fun of me. I shall be what he wants me to be."

"And you think you will be happy?"

"Yes."

"You've made up your mind?"

"Yes. . . . I wanted to talk to you before — before I promised him. But you didn't come. . . . I felt — treacherous to you. But you knew he was coming — and what he

wanted — and I tried to tell you a little in those notes. I thought maybe you'd guess."

"No, I didn't guess," said Felix.

"I was very unhappy about it. I cried and cried. . . ."

"You used to think you hated J. H. . . ."

"Yes — I know I did. That was when Aunt Hattie was throwing him at my head. I didn't want to be rushed into marriage. I wanted —"

"You wanted to have your fling first," said Felix bitterly.

She gazed at him sadly.

"You don't really think that," she said. "You know I loved you."

"Why did you stop?" he asked. "Can you tell me that?"

"I don't know — quite. I had my fling, as you call it; and then I discovered I wanted something else."

"Marriage — or J. H.?"

"Oh, I couldn't think of inflicting myself as a wife on *you,* Felix! I was thinking, one of those times when we had to stay in the house, how dreadful it would be if we were married. . . . Our love belonged outside, not in a regular home. It wouldn't have done. . . . I thought about it," she confessed. "But it seemed — foolish. I could have a certain kind of happiness with you, and another kind with J. H. That was all. Do you understand?"

"And you really think you can — be what he wants you to be?"

"I'm sure of it," she said. "Don't think I don't love him, Felix. I do. And I'm going to be — a good wife!"

"And yet — you say you still love me?"

"Sort of. But not as I did. That's over."

"Is it over?"

"Yes — over for ever now."

He leaned forward and took her hands. She withdrew them from him, and then yielded them back. There was a silence, in which an ancient magic seemed to renew itself. They clung to each other's hands in silence a long while,

and her eyes, at last meeting his, let him softly into their depths. He rose and put his arms about her.

"No, Felix," she said. "Please don't. You know you can — but — don't! Please!"

He went back to his chair.

"Dear," she said, "I'm sorry!"

He suddenly put his head on the table and began to cry, dry-eyed.

She came and put her arms about him. "Felix, dear, I'm so sorry. I — I didn't know you cared — like that."

He looked up, his face grotesquely twisted with sobs. "You didn't know I cared?"

"No," she whispered. "Not that way. Did you really love me so much?"

He looked at her tragically. "What happened?" he asked. "What really came between us? I can't quite believe it."

She smoothed his hair. "I don't know," she said slowly. "It does seem strange, doesn't it? We loved each other so much. And then —"

"What began it?" he asked.

"Then we stopped talking to each other. You *wouldn't* talk. . . . You were so terribly sensitive."

"Was I?"

"You wouldn't let me come near you. . . . I was so sorry for you, Felix — I felt just like a mother. But you were too proud to let me comfort you. You tried to pretend that you weren't worried — I mean about that old job. It meant a lot to you, I know. I wanted to pet you and cheer you up and tell you that everything would come out all right. But you held me away. . . ."

"I did?"

"Yes. . . . And then I didn't understand — as I do now. I felt that you were shutting me out of your life. And — I'm proud, too, you know."

"Pride," said Felix, holding her other hand close to his breast.

"We both acted very foolishly," she said. "But being shut out of your thoughts wasn't at all my notion of being — lovers."

"I thought," said Felix painfully, "that you — that maybe you didn't believe in me any more."

"Believe in you! How ridiculous! Of course I believed in you, Felix. Do you suppose I blamed you for losing that silly job? You mean that I thought — Oh, Felix!"

"I had lost my — my place in the world," he said. "And I thought perhaps you just considered me a dreamer — a man who would never succeed."

"I knew you could succeed — if you wanted to. Sometimes I wasn't sure you wanted to. I'm glad you do want to, Felix — for your own sake. You *can* do whatever you want to — I believe that absolutely. What you want to do may not be what other people think is the best, but —"

"You make me out to be a much more determined person than I am," he protested. "I really feel — awfully helpless. I don't know what I would have done if the *Record* —"

"Oh, nonsense, there are other newspapers in the world. I know what you would have done. You would have gone to Chicago — on a freight train, if necessary."

"I wonder?"

"I'm sure of it. I've heard you talk about Chicago, and I knew then that you would go. You are a writer, and you belong where there is your kind of work to do. I doubt if you'll stay much longer in Port Royal, anyway. It's no place for a person like you."

"I suppose," he mused, "when I lose my job on the *Record* I'll have to go somewhere else. . . ."

"I have to laugh at you, Felix, really. Your airs of helplessness! I don't believe you understand yourself at all. Sometimes I haven't understood you myself. But I do now. I've thought a lot about you lately. You — in the first place, you're absolutely ruthless."

"I?"

"Don't pretend to be shocked. Of course you are. You know what you want, and take it."

"For example?"

"For example, me. You are a writer, you want experience. Here am I — and you take me! — You want to learn how to write novels. There's Tom — and you take him.— And when you're through with us, you move on. You need Chicago — and you'll take that. Oh, I know from the things you've said lately — it's neither me nor Tom, now; it's Chicago."

"Funny girl!" he said. And then after a pause, "Do you know why I was trying so hard to get a job in a soap-factory or a harness-shop or a stove-works here in Port Royal?"

"No — unless it was to avoid the opportunity of spending your time playing with me! No — I never could guess, and of course you were too proud to tell me. What *was* the reason?"

He laughed. "You will never know," he said.

She laughed, too. "Do you still like me, Felix?"

"I love you," he said.

"I'm glad. Because I love you, too. And you won't be mad at me for — for marrying J. H.?"

"I can't be mad at you for anything," he said.

"Then you can kiss me — nicely!" And she bent her face to his.

"And maybe you can come and see me some time. If you'll be friends with J. H. I really think you two would like each other."

"Some time," he said. "Not now."

"You can kiss me again," she whispered.

They kissed, and it seemed to Felix, as he felt her love unquenchably flooding her trembling body, that he was looking into the Abyss.

Even now it was not too late.

Should he try?

No — she was right. . . .

"We must go," she whispered. "We shouldn't have done that. Come, we must hurry."

2

It was dark on the way home, and Felix sat a little apart from Joyce, and he had the curious illusion that instead of a steering wheel, she was bent softly over a child — the child that should have been hers and his.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

LII Ending

I

IN the woods back of Tom's place in the country was a creek. Felix wanted to go there and sit beside its coolness, and let it wash this burning ache from his mind. Flowing water had its own magic. He must go there now, quickly.

He stopped at the railway station, and found that there was no train at this hour which stopped at the village. Then he would walk. He turned to go, and his eye was caught by a map on the wall, a map in which a dozen iron roads were shown crossing the Middle West and centering in a dark blotch up in the corner. . . . He went out.

He would take the river road, which he had tramped with Tom.

The pain of useless thought, the intolerable pain of memory. . . . If once he could get to that creek, and sit beside it until morning. It would take away his pain, it would wash clean his mind, it would dissolve the debris of the past in its cool stream and carry it away for ever. . . .

It did not seem possible that there would be a time, soon, very soon, when his mind would not hurt like this. But it was true, he knew it was true; he would stop caring, stop feeling. . . . The stream would free him of his pain.

The road emerged from hiding bluffs, and he saw beside him the river, dark in the darkness. The stream would carry his thoughts to the river, and the river would carry them to the sea, and they would be lost for ever. . . .

The miles went past. Soon he would be there, beside the creek, in the darkness, listening to its soft music. Water knows something which we do not know. It knows how to forget — and it teaches us.

2

A little farther, beside the grey river — the great grey stream that slides toward the sea. That slides toward the sea. Port Royal. *Beside the great grey stream that slides toward the sea.* Not a bad line! He would use that in his Port Royal poem, the one he was going to write for the *Record*. . . . He had been happy in Port Royal: it had given him love, and painful wisdom, and the joy of struggle. He would like to write a poem about it. The town had been built for him, though they who built it had not known. It had been built for young men and girls to be happy in, to adventure in, and to think strange and free and perilous thoughts. It was not like other towns. . . . No, it had a history of its own — from the first it had been a rebellious place. It had been founded so, by men who were different from others — or it was pleasant to think so. *And lion-hearted men saw in each other's eyes dimly the first faint gleam of that same high surmise.* . . .

Yes, it was an amusing thought, that Port Royal had been built for such purposes — for growing up in. Port Royal was not everything, of course. It had sufficed nobly. It had given him much. And now —

He saw again in his mind's eye, as he tramped the road, a picture of the map on the wall of the railway station — the map with a picture of iron roads from all over the Middle West centering in a dark blotch in the corner. . . .

"Chicago!" he said to himself.

And then the hurt came again — the hurt of lost beauty, of unforgotten, unforgettable love. Felix quickened his steps. Another mile. And water. And forgetting.

But his tramping steps went to the rhythm of a word that said itself over and over in his mind:

"Chicago! Chicago!"

Date Due

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

17444

81
D38F
XMo

Dell

Moon-calf

D38F
XMo

17444

AUTHOR
Dell, Floyd,

TITLE

81.
D38F
XMo

17444

Augsburg Seminary
Library